Be Like Adam's Son

By: **Jawdat Sa'eed**

Abridged and translated from Arabic by:
Dr. Abdullatif al-Khaiat

Foreword

Praise be to God; may peace be upon His chosen prophets, and upon those who call to justice and mercy.

I take up here an approach to the main dilemma of human life on this planet; I tackle this issue in the light of the story of Adam's two sons, as related by God in His Scripture, the Qur'an (5:27-31). In that parable, we have two distinct methods of dealing with life's problems, since one of Adam's sons tried to get over the problem by killing the other, like a doctor trying to get over the disease by killing the patient; and the other held back his hand, and affirmed that killing could not be the right solution.

I may mention here that it is fortunate that I propound my idea at this juncture in time, when mankind happens to be primed for comprehending the method of Adam's son. Humankind has almost understood, through lots and lots of suicidal trials, that violence is just not the way. For my part, I have devoted all my humble effort to bringing this fact to the notice of humankind. I have no doubt that later studies will greatly overshadow my effort. My only accomplishment would be then that I have shaken the sleepers to open their eyes and see things from a vantage point that they had never suspected to exist.

So let us start with this point. One big hurdle that prevents Arabs and Muslims from probing their dilemmas is Israel. But they seem to forget in this respect that our real problem is not Israel, nor the imperial powers. A more basic problem that lurks behind our tragic conditions is that we suffer from certain mental drawbacks for which neither Israel, nor any imperial power, are responsible. Long ago the Qur'an warned us to look for our troubles in the right place: " Say: 'It is from yourselves.'" (3:165) If any still have doubts that our basic ills lie within our souls, let them remember the Second Gulf War, when we forgot about Israel, and were sure that more important than Israel were the disputes among us – we even summoned those same imperial powers to help us defeat our domestic 'enemy.'

Just make peace among yourselves, with each other, and you will see, Arabs and Muslims, how the world will respect you, will try to win your favor; and you will see how America will turn its back on Israel; because America has always changed sides when it proved more profitable to do so.

The point here is that no one can subjugate us unless we agree to be subjugated. But if we still refuse to learn, then more catastrophes and more scourge will force us one day to learn, though after we have paid for our failure to open our ears and eyes earlier. We shall have to learn, if not through learning from history, then from more pain and catastrophes. The Qur'an is replete with exhortation to look and listen and think, as in this verse, "And how many signs in the heavens and earth do they pass by? Yet they turn their faces away from them." (12:105)

Can we for instance envision a future situation in which we have really established peace among ourselves, peace whereby no one will have to jeopardize anything, neither territory, nor position? Can our intellectuals perceive that? It will be clear then that what we need is not the great

hero that comes forth and forces us by might into a unified body. For as long as we keep waiting for the one man to come and draw us out of the abyss we shall never find our way.

But I am sure that the light of day is coming, because of what God has promised, "Their intention is to extinguish Allah's Light by blowing with their mouths; but Allah will complete the revelation of His Light," (61:8) and on the basis of what I have seen and heard in this world.

Beer Ajam (a village southwest of Syria), 6/11/1996

INTRODUCTORY

THE LANGUAGE OF WORDS AND THE LANGUAGE OF CONCEPTS

Let us start our discussion with the following short tradition of the Prophet's (peace be upon him): "Follow the example of Adam's son" (an authentic tradition, reported by al-Tirmidhi, and also, in slightly different wording, by Abu Dawood.)

Is not this a tradition of the Prophet's? If so, why have Muslims generally not cared for it? Or even flouted and derided the concept in it? I still remember when, as I was once elaborating on this, one among the audience said: "Nay! I will never buy this! If I am to enter Paradise, I want to enter it with my sword brandished high in my hands; never with my head bent down with submission and surrender."

Often have we seen a Muslim scholar devote a whole book to the explication of one tradition of the Prophet's (peace be upon him), so why have all the scholars totally ignored the above tradition?

To go one further step; let us inquire what renders a certain text idle and inoperative? It is worth our while to inquire how the Qur'an and the sunnah (the Prophet's traditions) have fared across the ages, how certain portions are ignored and others attended to. A whole science should be dedicated to the study of the processes through which texts come to be brought into life or thrown into oblivion. I know some light has been thrown on this, but it is not yet developed into a science, which we do need.

We do notice how humans' minds go through changes, as a result of which they are most inattentive to things that used to be of primary importance; and how often this happens to us, and in connection with our most precious texts! That is why I yearn to see people investigate why for instance we ignore certain parts of the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions. (I did raise such inquiry in my Foreword to the book *No, Jury, God Before King!*)

The Messenger was once mentioning a certain future event, when he commented: "This will take place when men have deserted knowledge." One companion, Ziad bin Labid, objected: "How can this be, Messenger of Allah, when we learn the Qur'an and will have our children recite it, and they will have their children recite it, and so on until the Day of Judgment?" "Oh, Ziad! I used to take you to think better than most in Medina! Do you not see how the Jews and the Christians still hold the Bible, yet it does them no good at all?" (A fairly authentic tradition, reported by al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah.)

We may say in light of the above tradition that we have the language of letters and words, and the language of concepts and ideas. In the above parable of Adam's two sons, the aggressor could not grasp certain notions – his concepts were not mature enough to handle the situation as a human being should do. And when the Prophet spoke to the Quraish tribe in Makkah (Mecca) they failed to comprehend, though he used the same medium they used – they all shared the same Arabic language; but the dispute was over a certain rigid worldview of theirs which they refused to reconsider.

I do realize that the modern age is beginning to see more into such matters. The problems connected with this have been with humankind since humans walked on this planet, but analyzing them is quite recent. The average Muslim is happy that he/she was born in a certain culture, for he/she says: "Thank God I was born in a Muslim culture; for if I were born elsewhere, I would be a

follower of a different religion." He is virtually saying here: "If I had been born in a different part of the world, I would have followed that culture's religion, would have taken over their worldview, their ideas about salvation, about sacred texts, and about whence we came and where we go. I would have taken other men for models of perfection, and as my reference for right conduct."

How hard it is to make a fresh start and to change direction can be ascertained from exploring precedents in history. But we may begin to open our eyes by reflecting on how the Muslim has come to a state when many texts, those of the Qur'an and sunnah (the Prophet's traditions), fall on deaf ears.

Muslims are especially wary of social sciences – they are worried that such sciences would unearth facts about humankind which contravene the Qur'an or the sunnah, for Muslims would not say then that what proved to be false was their own comprehension of the Qur'an and sunnah, but the Qur'an and sunnah themselves. It is hard for them to admit that their minds can have borne illusions that blur comprehension. The cocoon in which they hide all that they take to be sacred is believed to be inherent in texts; and that is why men have often preferred to die in defense of concepts which they sanctify, for they take them to come from God. If the Prophet's companion failed in the above tradition to comprehend how knowledge may deplete, then how can we be sure that we have not fallen into the same pit in which the Jews and Christians fell? And by the way we are again wrong when we do not delve into the Bible and see in it the light that the Qur'an has asserted it has: " It was We Who revealed the Law to Moses: therein was guidance and light. … therefore fear not men, but fear Me, and do not sell My Signs for a miserable price." (5:44) Instead, we quite simply say: "They have gone astray because their Scriptures have been distorted while we will never go astray as our Scripture will never be distorted, for it has been preserved by God Himself."

One thing one may conclude is that texts may often not help in leading people out of their dilemmas; we may be in need of another paradigm that helps us benefit from the light of the Qur'an; we really need to reflect on that which the Messenger was concerned about, and foresaw that the Muslims would encounter in the same way as other nations had encountered.

<u>Adam's son and the Quibbling Factions</u>

Over the ages we have seen how the Muslim factions, like the followers of other religions, have clashed with each other and killed each other in the name of their understanding of religion. But we have a good model in Adam's son – for he announced his refusal to be a party in this vicious circle of killing and counter-killing. And when the Messenger, peace be upon him, told two of his companions, on two separate occasions, to keep aloof when people went into partisan fighting, was he demanding something that clashed with normal human nature?

It is still a far cry to urge a Muslim adopt the way of Adam's son, for men still say that such stance goes contrary to humankind's instinct and inborn nature. And I fully realize that to overcome this concept it is not enough to cite verses of the Qur'an or traditions of the Prophet. But I do urge the Muslim to think of the following fact about the Qur'an: God does not mention the ruling concerning inheritance more than once or twice, but He mentions the facts of history scores of times. How often the Qur'an represents scenes from the lives of previous nations and peoples, what brought perdition to nations, what was the outcome of people's turning a blind ear to the facts of history, or denying that they could find in history any useful lessons!

It will be a definite step forward when we take the events of history as our concrete evidence that the Qur'an is a book of truth. On the other hand we shall never be able to go forward as long as we take an arrogant stance towards history, and believe that we are somehow above its rules. When a people believe that they are exempted from the verdicts of history they will no longer give heed to its lessons. It was Satan who first boasted that what applied to others did not apply to him. Once you take your race, your nation, your tribe, or your creed not to be subject to the same laws as apply

to others, that you have some special relationship with God or that you are of His own family, regardless of how you behave, then you will have chosen Satan's way.

This disease of arrogance and pride is something that makes one condemned to exclusion from entering Paradise, for the Prophet, peace be upon him, says, "No human will enter Paradise in whose heart there is the least grain of pride." (Related by Muslim) It is for this flaw of haughtiness that Satan was ejected from heaven, as the Qur'an reports, (15:34-35).

On the other hand Adam's son chose not to rise above the others; by holding his hand from assaulting the other, he announced his rejection of any kind of arrogance.

CHAPTER ONE

POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

Specialization and Organizations

At each level, specialization, starting with the body organs, is vital for human life; and in the same way as the body organs work individually and collectively, experts and specialists work in the social sphere as individuals and collectively, as organizations. But in either case a specialist must work for the good of society, in the same way as each organ of the body's works for the good of the whole body. Once an organ's activity is not in unison with the rest of organs, it turns into a sinister factor. Is not cancer an activity of the body's, with the only difference that it goes out of hand and does not work in unison with the rest of the body?

To ask about the relationship between power or authority and knowledge, two specializations of society, is the same as asking about the thinking person and the acting person, the designer and the executive. In these pairs, efficient cooperation must be maintained for productive relation. Should action go ahead in disregard of thinking, it will not be fruitful; and in the same way, to think in disregard of action is to think in a vacuum.

A human does some work first of all, then his/her work engenders some knowledge; and from observing how the performed action leads to certain results, cause and effect are connected, which is vital knowledge. In this way a human understands profitable and good action. Knowledge accumulates as a human observes the relationship between the cause and effect. Later, it often happens that knowledge is conveyed to others before they are involved in action. The logic of things in real terms is that action comes first, and then knowledge is engendered from observing action, from noting the effect that results from action. But as more connections of causes and effects are observed, they are recorded and transmitted as sciences and experiences. Those who ignore past experience will be losers in knowledge, and the quality of their action will be poor.

We may reflect here on names and things, or designations and their referents. A human gets first to know something, and as his/her knowledge of the thing grows he/she assigns a designation to that thing. So in real terms, the referent occurs first, and at a certain stage it acquires a designation or name. But when we teach a child, we teach him/her with words before those words acquire a concrete sense.

It must be clear from the above discussion that any attempt to separate knowledge from action is meaningless. Knowledge is the accumulation of action. We acquire experience from the accumulation of action, and that is knowledge and science.

So much experience of early men must have been lost before men learned how to preserve it in vocal or optical mediums. Of course, a human had his/her brain to store his/her experience, but a brain decomposes with the death of the human, and so all its contents are lost; but when a human first used oral transmission of information, and later written expression, his/her experiments, and his/her memory, gained permanence. What men found out could now be revised and modified in the light of more experience. And now of course we analyze language in specialized sciences, like linguistics and semiotics.

Let us make it clear that no matter how developed and sophisticated sciences grow, they must remain closely tied to the actual state of things in the world. Action must remain the source of knowledge. The Qur'an has urged a human to keep his/her eyes open (as in 11:6).

We may refer to a tradition of the Prophet's as an illustration of this work-knowledge relationship. The tradition goes like this: "A believer may not be bitten twice from the same hole." (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim) What we have in this text is putting experience before knowledge, as it asserts that it is not compatible with faith that one falls in the same error twice. Knowledge is here seen to be learning from a certain experience that one has gone through. On the other hand, one may go forth into action of which he has had no precedent; but after going through the experience, one may make conclusions; and there is science for you! From this it must be seen that there is no direct answer as to which comes first, action or knowledge.

This must help many people who give science precedence over action. The Qur'an would not let knowledge go in disregard of action (see for instance 19:96).

But whenever we fail to find precedents, that is, when no scientific facts exist to shed light on our way, we feel forced to go again into a trial-and-error venture.

Power and Knowledge Again

We are now in a better position to ask again if power and knowledge are one and the same thing, or the two sides of one coin.

What we see in life is that power, or authority, is different from knowledge; we see for instance how the ruling elite is different from the intellectual elite. This dialectic relation can be better understood through analogy. Let us look for instance at agriculture. Crops used to grow without human intervention at first. And then people observed, and from first observing and then working at cultivating crops humankind developed scientific agriculture. We can go from here to observing what happens in social life, and to draw out laws and rules; and if our knowledge is sound enough, we can ourselves choose what will happen in the particular context we have investigated. In this spirit we can study authority and knowledge.

Let us as a start say that authority is the fruit of knowledge, a particular type of knowledge. To understand this it is necessary that one realizes that knowledge is not just a homogeneous mass. Knowledge can be solid and hard, or can be soft; one may have knowledge and is conscious of it, or it may lie deep in his subconscious without his/her being aware of it. You may just reflect on our ability to speak – how the acquisition of words begins by learning words and expressions with effort, and then, as we use the learned things time after time, they are produced unconsciously. We can notice this more clearly in our learning a foreign tongue – you see how the process of language learning begins as an arduous effort, and ends up as a smooth flow in which the subconscious mind plays more and more the main part. It is especially noticeable how some rules of grammar are present in the conscious mind, but they may take a very long time to be used spontaneously, i.e. we have difficulty shifting them from the conscious to the subconscious mind. And some scholars of the grammar of a foreign tongue can tell you the rules to perfection, but still make so many errors when using the foreign language. It is quite relevant here to reflect how God reminds us that learning the facts of belief and disbelief, and getting to know the world, is not unlike this process of speaking, "Then, by the Lord of heavens and earth, this is the very Truth, as much as the fact that you can speak intelligently to each other." (51:23)

Of course one can think of so many situations in which one's mastery of the skill proceeds from the conscious to the subconscious – riding a bicycle, typing, driving a car, swimming, and so on.

We may go on to consider situations where the conscious and subconscious go in different directions, as happens in mental disturbances handled by psychiatrists. It also happens that one may consciously claim to be something which is only superficially admitted, while deep in the mind one knows himself/herself not to believe in that which he/she claims to believe – this is the condition of the hypocrite. This mismatch of the two levels of consciousness is an important topic in the Qur'an, such as in the following example: "Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, while they thought that they were acquiring good by their works." (18:104)

But how does all this pertain to the problem of authority and knowledge? Something definitely goes wrong in the Muslim world in this relationship between the body of scholars and the ruling elite. And we need to take this up in earnest. Since the mid 1960s I have felt the need to shed light on this situation, and back then I made a first attempt at this in my first book, *The Way of Adam's son*.

Now in the right order of things knowledge should use power to serve the good of people. We see this for instance in harnessing powers like electricity to do us various services. While electricity can shock or even kill a human in case he/she does not know how to deal with it – it is really not in electricity's nature to surrender to human beings and to help them; it is rather people's learning about its laws that enabled them to subdue it and use it to their good.

From this we may reflect on another point that is related to our discussion: people, even the scholarly ones, generally hold to things they have heard so many times, and deny what is new to them. But let us further reflect that some of the ideas and norms that we now accept without difficulty caused some people in the past to be tortured for holding them. It is often unfortunate how long it takes a novel idea to get to be commonly accepted. We may readily accept innovations in technology, but that is not so in social matters. It is much harder for social facts to get settled in the subconscious.

All that we have gone through about this conscious-subconscious business is quite relevant to our discussion of the authority and knowledge and men of knowledge.

Let us begin with stating that in our part of the world authority draws more on the subconscious than on the conscious; that is because we have not yet learned at the conscious level enough about the modern concept of authority. It takes time and effort to quite comprehend the modern sense of authority, and then more effort to be more familiarized with this developed sense of authority until it takes its place at the subconscious level. What determines how authority is like in our part of the world is the old notions that we inherited from previous centuries. Even when we declare and announce our conviction that authority must develop into a more democratic form, our conviction there is shallow and has not taken root. Such conviction will have to be more fully internalized before it is reflected in our various moods and activities, and will have to be seen in our art and literature. At present, it is still a brittle and tender thing.

Therefore we are justified in saying that our knowledge in connection with authority is at variance with the practice of authority; but had our knowledge been solid enough, then authority as it is practiced will have to apply what is settled in our minds. The Qur'an teaches us how knowledge does not occur in an all-or-none state – Abraham, for instance assures his Lord that he does believe, but he needs to strengthen his faith, "Behold! Abraham said: 'My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead.' He said: 'Do you not then believe?' He said: 'Yes! But to satisfy my own heart.' " (2:260) So if God guided Abraham here how to deepen his faith, how can we revive that right conception of authority, which has been in slumber for centuries and centuries?

Look carefully, young man and young woman! The real authority belongs to knowledge; and when you see a scholar who has no authority, it is because he is not well-grounded in his knowledge. Do not be daunted by the power elite's strutting around – indeed, once firm and solid knowledge comes, the authority will without much ado transfer into the scholars' hand. When we now see the wrong people holding the reins, we must imagine them saying, without words: "Do not blame me, O scholars! blame rather yourselves! It is only that your knowledge is still lame and inadequate. If you had attained to sound knowledge, I would be at your service, rather than you at mine. You in fact know almost nothing about the new age, and that is shown in your bending low before this obsolete and outmoded kind of rule. You are even dazzled and subdued at the spectacle of modern knowledge, and would not rise to absorbing it. Such knowledge as you possess is brittle and not impressive at all!"

Authority, Physical Strength, and Knowledge

When you see people of knowledge cringing before physical strength, you should know how unreliable, how poor in quality their knowledge is. They hardly know the laws that govern the battle of understanding versus physical strength. As long as an intellectual can be tempted to enter into physical conflict in defense of his convictions, then he does not appreciate the value of knowledge – He does not perceive that intellectual power is indeed far greater than any physical power. Abraham, as his experience is recounted in the Qur'an, could not be misled there: "His people disputed with him. He said: 'Do you come to dispute with me, about Allah, when He Himself has guided me? I do not fear the beings you associate with Allah: unless my Lord wills, nothing can happen. My Lord comprehends in His knowledge all things. Will you not yourselves be admonished? How should I fear the beings you associate with Allah, when you do not fear to give partners to Allah without any warrant having been given to you? Which of us two parties has more right to security? Tell me if you know. It is those who believe and do not confuse their belief with wrong – that are truly in security, for they are on right guidance.'" (6:80-82)

By understanding the Abrahamic method and applying it, we can reverse the current of the power struggle; it will be as big a revolution in the social sphere as that of the revolutions in astronomy at the hands of Copernicus and Galileo, and the revolutions in biology. Let it be remembered how, for centuries and centuries, men thought that the sun revolved round the earth, and then it turned out that it is the other way round, that the earth goes round the sun. And in the same way, we still believe that knowledge is a satellite of physical power, while it is not so. When the truth will emerge here, as it emerged in astronomy, the scholar will cease to stand abashed in all abjection at the door of the ruler.

Another fact that transpires from recalling the sun and the earth and which revolves around which is that the human brain is extremely likely to err, even when people are unanimously agreed on something; it is lifting our vision to the world around us that puts us right. The world never goes in accordance with our desires. At one stage, at the time of the Enlightenment they took a human to be the ultimate reference; they failed to see the unreliability of a human's intellect. But God points out the way, in Abraham's saying, "My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead," (2:260) and in the other verse: "There is nothing whatever like unto him." (42:11) The Qur'an tells us to look not within, but at the real world created by God. What the prophets taught was a new principle for dealing with a human, nothing like dealing with the rest of the universe. A human requires laws specific to him/her, for you change people by changing the contents of their mind – no need for spilling blood. It was something unprecedented and unheard of: you do not need to eliminate the human being; you only need to change what goes on inside his/her mind.

Hence is the sacredness of the human soul in the Qur'an and the sunnah (the Prophet's traditions.) You do not kill the ill person, but you treat his disease. How deplorable it is that those who are supposed to help others change are often intent on eliminating those people in need of change. How often has this happened in the Muslims' history! Therefore I often say that what the prophets taught has not taken root as solid knowledge. But what many generations fail to comprehend will be comprehended at a certain stage of human maturity – and this is also another lesson we learn from the Qur'an: "And you shall certainly know the truth of it all after a while." (38:88)

So we need to reflect again and again on that big news promulgated by the prophets, as the Qur'an reports: "'Concerning what are they disputing? Concerning the Great News." (78:1-2); and: "Say: 'This is a Message Supreme above all, from which you turn away!'" (38:67-68)

The Physical Conflict and the Intellectual Conflict

By showing the distinction between physical conflict and intellectual conflict, the prophets liberated humankind. They established a new and liberating state of affairs when they put forward debate as

the basis for changing the contents of the mind. It is a really new type of challenge; it calls a human to move on from muscular challenge to intellectual challenge, from conflict that is more suitable for animals, to a conflict that is worthy of the human being. An expressive verse of the Qur'an about this shift is "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands our clear from Error." (2:256)

This move from the struggle of physical force to the conflict of ideas is decisive. So much mischief results from confounding the two types of conflict – no one who understands 'Let there be no compulsion in religion' should be led to confound the two. Remember that those who try to challenge you by trying to lead you to a physical clash when your cause is intellectual, are essentially people who have nothing of any solidity to put up for an intellectual conflict or debate.

It may help if I provide some details about the evolution of ideas. An idea is conceived as an embryo for some time before it is born, and when it is born it is such a weak being. At that time it requires a lot of tender care and support to acquire some sturdiness. Indeed, the foundation for the intellectual argument was laid down at the same time when the first human being was created, or even just before his creation: this is what we find in the Qur'an: "Behold, your Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent on earth.' They said: 'Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? While we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy name?' He said: 'I know what you do not know.' And he taught Adam the nature [and naming] of all things." (2:30-31) You see how the angels were baffled – why should God place on earth a creature that was unlike anything they had known? But God did not say much about this new creation; He merely said, "I know what you do not know" (2:30) The angels expressed their pessimism about human future – they expected only mischief from this new creature. But God's reply was laconic, though it stressed hope in humankind, that the way was open for something other than doing mischief and the spilling of blood.

But let us move from the unseen to the material world, how men responded to that new spirit breathed in man, when man learned the naming of things, when he was ordained to learn through reading, when he was entrusted with putting right his life, correcting his ways, and dealing with his world through a study of the outcome of any behavior.

Man was given the potential to transcend the laws that restrict other creatures to the physical sphere. It is your duty not to regress to the laws of the body; let your aspiration soar to the laws of the soul, to knowledge, to thinking and to creativity.

Jalalud-Deen al-Rumi, the great poet, has something to help us understand this higher order open to man, in the symbolic story of the chickpea. In this story, a woman is cooking chickpeas in a pot, and she addresses a chickpea in these words: "Do not blame me, chickpea, that I boil you! Once you were nothing but a lump of earth, and then you were promoted to a blooming flower in the field, then to a new fruit. And now you are rising higher: through cooking you mature, and you will be a constituent of a human." And the chickpea replies: "Yes, ma'am, let your fire blaze hotter! Let me rise to a higher order!"

Is not this parable most significant? Why should a human regress to the domain of the body, when he/she is endowed with the soul and the intellect! This is indeed what Adam's son attained: he established the new order, the law of knowledge and understanding to counter the law of the body. It is unfortunate that the human often does not sense this right for him/her to think about things in the heavens and on the earth. The prophets' mission was in this: to urge a human to renounce all fetters to his/her mind's right to wander and wonder; therefore we were taught this verse in the Qur'an, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2:256). And the good thing about the prophets is that they did not teach thinking as a sermon; they actually practiced it. They did away with the high-handedness of physical force as a factor in the debate of ideas and faith. It was raising a human to a new order.

When you hold on to the debate of ideas, you proclaim peace for the other, and you are entitled to get peace for yourself. You announce that you leave the domain of repression and compulsion and enter the domain of "no compulsion" in faith and thought. If you still do not see the

discrimination between intellectual and physical conflicts, then your faith has not taken its place in your heart. It is only a weakling in the sphere of ideas who resorts to physical force. Try all the time to remember Abraham (as in the Qur'an, 6:80 etc.), and his rejection of being intimidated as long as he holds to his ideas and calls to a debate of ideas. Such rejection of fear cannot happen by acting out a part. It only happens as a result of steady faith. He most lucidly perceived who was entitled to feel safe and who could not enjoy this contentment.

And Abraham was in perfect harmony with his ideas from beginning to end. He asked his people what made them worship the idols? Did those idols cause harm? Did they benefit their followers? Abraham lays the basis for the best realistic dealing with the things of life: to see the benefits and harm as the basic criterion; his adversaries, on the other hand, found it sufficient for them to decide about things on the basis of their forefathers' way. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, God lays down the general criterion in different words, "Thus Allah shows Truth and Vanity. For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth;" (13:17) as the major law that governs the world: what does good will stay; and what does harm will go. Of course, people may be deluded when they see falsehood survive for some time, but the law will remain true at present and in the future. What is good for people will stay, and what brings harm, or no longer does any good, will vanish: we should not even cry over its disappearance.

It gives one great contentment to know this law of history; a human has no reason to worship things of the earth, and no reason to hold any thing as associate to God. Hence Abraham's feeling of security.

Abraham: The Forefathers Are not the Reference

It will be useful to remember Abraham, as the progenitor of the universal law: that the forefathers are not the reference; the reference is in how much good or mischief something will do.

It is not only a law of worship; it is the law of history; it is even the law of what is enjoined and what is forbidden in religion. When God prohibits alcoholic drinks and lottery, He makes it clear that they are forbidden for they do more harm than good: "They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say: 'In them is great sin, and some profit, for men; but the sin is greater than the benefit;'" (2:219) and somewhere else: "Intoxicants and gambling, dedication of stones, and divination by arrows, are an abomination, of Shaitan's handiwork: eschew such abomination, that you may prosper." (5:90). And about both the permitted and the forbidden: "for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil." (7:57) Therefore, it was stated by some Muslim jurists: "That which is beneficial, in all or in most cases, is enjoined; and that which is harmful, in all or in most cases, is forbidden."

We find the same law in the Bible: "For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes." (Luke, 6:44) The followers of all three religions, Jews, Christians and Muslims tend to believe that they are privileged, but the Qur'an assures us that there is no lineage to God that does us good, "Not your desires, nor those of the People of the Book can prevail: whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly." (4:123)

But though Abraham did lay the law, men have not benefited much from it; they still hold on to some reference other than that of what does good and what does harm. There were great men, though, who urged people not to let their idolization of their forefathers impede their going forward and dealing with things in a realistic manner. Toynbee, the great historian, identifies six personalities who have been, and still are the most influential. Four of them are Confucius, the Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad. And he finds the common factor among their messages to be that they called on men to renounce their idolization of society.

It has been a landmark of human history when some came upon this principle of renouncing the forefather's position as reference, a kind of idolization. But it has not yet taken root in the world. And the Veto Right that we still find in the highest council in the world, the UN Security Council, is

another manifestation of idolization. The principle here is the same as that of the primitive people's: As long as I am stronger, then we are not equal as human beings.

It is a fact about human beings that as long as they are the weaker party, they call for equality and justice. So let each one of us test himself/herself to see if he/she can accept to deal with the other on an equal footing when he/she happens to be in stronger position. But when we accept the principle of distinguishing the intellectual conflict from the physical one, we can accept to deal with people even-handedly. One must test himself/herself with regard to the prophets' stance when they said, as the Qur'an reports, "We shall certainly bear with patience all the hurt you may cause us;" (14:12) and "Rejected were the Messengers before you: with patience and constancy they bore their rejection and their wrongs, until Our aid reached them." (6:34) A major test to our holding to the value of ideas is when we do have the upper hand – will we then use force to stifle other ideas than our own? Muslim history is a witness that we again and again suppressed the opposing ideas.

So will you stand the others' giving you the lie? And will you hold on to putting up ideas to counter ideas? Are you sure to restrain yourself from any resorting to physical conflict in that case?

Another point in this connection is that even if one comes out victorious in the conflict of ideas, and without any intervention of physical force, his/her battle is not finally won! To conform to ideas after one has won his/her battle is even harder than at the time he/she used to be weak. About that we may cite this debate between Moses and his people, as reported by the Qur'an: "they said: 'We have had nothing but trouble, both before and after you came to us.' He said: 'It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemy and make you inheritors in the earth: that so He may try you by your deeds.'" (7:129)

I hope you appreciate now why I say that the age of the prophets has not yet come, that their call is still in the womb of history. But that it will come out into light is a certainty.

How vast a stride humankind had gone when it came to accept "Let there be no compulsion in religion!" Indeed the historian Toynbee admitted that the idea of "Let there be no compulsion in religion" was laid down a long time ago by Islam but "we in Britain did not accept it until quite recently." Well, but the idea is born. When an idea that is quite novel and unlike anything in people's consciousness and practice is born, then it will be received as odd or even perverse. Then a few, who have the talent to reflect, begin to take it up and to discuss it, then more people begin to accept it – and then there will be a time when people are so familiar with it that they no longer mention it. They behave in accordance with it as part of their subconscious.

The idea of 'Let there be no compulsion in religion' (2:256) is already accepted in many parts of the world, but, paradoxically, not in the Muslim world, although it was revealed in their Scripture before any other nation was conscious of it. Muslims do assert that they accept it on the level of religions, but even there it has no root in our part of the world. The truth is that man is quite immature in the domain of ideas. The Muslims hold doggedly and tenaciously to compulsion in thought and politics, in the same way as they surrender to tyrants.

Followers of the prophets, those who urge men to be just and fair are there in the world, but they are disunited and they do not manage to work in harmony. There is nothing like an authority or agency that keeps an eye on mischief and corruption in the world. Those who know enough to uphold the prophets' message do not do what is incumbent on them; they do not seem to feel the heavy duty that is waiting for them to fulfill. How badly does humankind need to be reminded that they can be liberated from idolizing falsehood, and are capable of standing for truth!

At least those whose duty is to uphold justice and truth should exhort men not to be dragged into physical conflict in the name of supporting ideas, and not to be like a gun in the hand of the advocates of privileges, or a stick in the hands of the tyrant. It is a simple enough demand, but of such potent effect. Do you not see how all the armies of the world train their soldiers to be like guns in the hands of their commanders, like senseless beings that are devoid of discrimination or sensibility? That is more evidence that the prophets' age, that is their teachings, has not yet arrived.

No Obedience in Defiance of God's Command!

The prophets introduced something quite astonishing: the idea of "No obedience in defiance of God's command!" (an expression said by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.) To say this is such a simple thing. I may now add that men have found it hard to accept this principle on account of its simplicity. The rule here is that there is no blind obedience; no obedience when one is commanded to act in disobedience with God's command. This applies not only to God's commands expressed in words, but to His laws as witnessed in the universe. See the statistics; see the outcome of men's conduct. See what good a certain conduct causes, and what mischief. And that is part of the prophets' followers' duty: to put men's hands on real-life situations which show the blessing of heeding God's laws. Unless we can make people see and comprehend the sense of what actually takes place, by showing them the outcome of men's deeds, they may deny what is true. It is true that the law is enacted in heaven, but it works here on earth. Who will make the common people realize that they can commune with God here on earth: for when they are helping a sick person, a hungry person, or an ignorant person, they will be in the company of God (in reference to a tradition of the Prophet's to that effect.)

To see the words of God work, we need always to contemplate them with reference to real-life social situations. The world is at the disposal of humankind, and society is not excluded from that: it, too, can be at the disposal of those who care to study its laws. The meaning of this is that society can be controlled with the laws of good behavior and bad behavior; and when we direct a human, we merely tap that potential which is already in his/her nature. To develop a yearning for good guidance we need to distinguish faith from injustice, for at present they are still confused.

It seems more effective to start with injustice, for once we bring it out most graphically and make it crystal clear, then faith will also be understood. We do see how, driven by faith, some people are ready to lay down their life to promote that which they believe in. But such faith can be a belief in what is injurious, and as such can be counterproductive. And that is why we had better start with the concept of injustice.

Now injustice is the opposite of justice. And justice means that you are fair, that you allow the other what you allow yourself – you realize and admit that you have no right to rise above him or to allow yourself what you deny him. One can be close or far from this ideal. The subtle point here is that justice will not be realized unless we follow the example of Adam's son. A society that does not accept the principle of Adam's son is not only lacking in maturity – its faith is murky and impure; it is mixed up with injustice. Unless society adopts the principle of even-handed dealings then it will be controlled by the principle of 'might is right.' And the oppressed is implicitly told that to be right, he will have to be physically stronger than the oppressor – a most destructive principle. It is this that shows you what places the Muslim world at the rear of the world's nations. Any nation that gives privilege to the stronger party will be groping in the wilderness.

Have I made my point clear. Perhaps not sufficiently clear. But I think I have made some progress. For a law to be a law, it must not be enforced on the weak alone or the favored alone, but it must be applied to all. The law I am trying to propound was well expressed by Christ:

"Put your sword back in its place … for all who draw the sword will die by the sword." (Mat. 26:52)

CHAPTER TWO

DREADING KNOWLEDGE

About the Birth of the Idea of *Follow the Example of Adam's son*

After the publication of my first book, *The Way of Adam's son* (in the mid-1960s), I was urged to write a sequel to it. That first book was brought out in a kind of hurry, as I felt at the time that something had to be said, before the uproar around me would submerge any sober talking. When, in 1990 I was invited to lecture in Sharjah, my host, Muhammad Salem al-Qasimee reminded me that my first book was, in my own words, just for proclamation; therefore, I was morally bound to bring out something, "for persuasion this time." Several others kept exhorting, but I somehow kept procrastinating.

And then, when my sister Laila succeeded at last in having me visit them in Canada in 1995, and after a visit to the United States, she put in front of me a sheaf of papers and said, "It is time you started." When I held the pen early next morning I felt I had the same feeling as I had at writing my first book, that a human's problem was in doing mischief, in not having learned the lesson of Adam's son.

Adam's son and the Problem of Doing Mischief

Even before Adam was created, the angels suspected, as the Qur'an reports, that he would be doing mischief, "Your Lord said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent on earth.' They said: 'Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? while we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy name?' He said: 'I know what you do not know.'" (2:30) You may note here that they did not say that a human might prove to be a disbeliever in God and the Last Day; that they suspected him of spilling blood and doing mischief proves that this is the mother of all evil. And my guess is that men will someday in the future cast back their memory and say, "How strange people were, when they sacrificed human life. Thank God we got rid of this atrocious ritual!"

It may be that Islam will be rediscovered at that time in the future. The events of history never cease to give their lessons, the more you read and reread about the past as the events of life accumulate.

Now when the angels asked that question of theirs, God replied most laconically, "I know what you do not know." Immediately next to that, as the Qur'an tells us, "And He taught Adam the nature of [and naming of] all things." (2:31) We need people to write about this verse, about the relationship between learning about and giving names to things and getting over evil. We need first to have those who appreciate the importance of this knowledge that Adam was taught. Clearly, it was the thing that explained raising Adam above all other creatures. It is so because it is through knowledge, the ability to learn with signs and symbols, that Adam would be able to get rid of doing mischief and shedding blood.

This major topic should be the preliminary science for understanding the condition of humankind, and a human's abilities.

I believe we can go some steps in the direction of comprehending this situation by examining how humankind ascended, how they plodded along the long and arduous way of their ascent, how many men and women died, and how many suffered in the progress from where

humankind was until it got to be what it is at present. This will give us a glimpse of how humans will develop towards a more decent condition in the future. We will also be in a position to determine what is required of us in that respect.

We need to know what drives a human to adopt a particular attitude, for people do not look for sound arguments; they rather receive their direction from their culture. And so, we need to know what arguments will work in the particular cultural atmosphere we wish to change.

The Qur'an does stress the importance of refreshing a human's memory, that a human is inclined to dismiss from memory the most vital facts. It reminds us that humans will come to a state when they no longer respond to admonition, and do not seem to comprehend at all. All these insights about humankind we urgently need, and we need to perceive how a human comes to a state when his/her deluded behavior seems good in his/her consideration, as the Qur'an states: "to whom the evil of his conduct is made alluring, so that he looks at it as good." (35:8) It is necessary that we understand what comes over man to make him willing to offer himself and others as sacrifices in order to preserve what is in his mind without change. Must not some young men and young women devote themselves to exploring this problem? Let them take note first of what the Qur'an says in that respect. Theses and dissertations need to focus on the various aspects of this topic: how common some features are, what conditions bring them on, and what conditions change them, what blurs vision in that respect, and so on.

It would be often helpful that a young man/ young woman should study societies other than their own. We are more likely to see what is good and what is bad when we are dealing with other societies.

It will be noted that there is a major difference between ailments of the body and mental troubles. It has been said that when we hear about a physical disease, we may wonder if we have it, but when we read or hear about a psychological problem, we seem to be sure that we do not suffer that trouble. Men are quick to notice shortcomings in others' characters, but not in their own. At best, they may be prepared to believe that they do have a certain shortcoming, but they would judge it to be quite insignificant.

Some mystic sufis were more adept in this sacred area of divining the drawbacks of character; and of course some historians, cultural scientists, and psychologists can make some admirable insights in that respect. Comparing societies and cultures will lift some of the fogginess from people's vision, to help them see attitudes and conduct for what they are. As long as one is isolated, he/she will take his/her own culture to be superior, and perhaps as being favored by God; but one begins to see where his/her culture stands when he/she studies other cultures, and other religions, than his/she own. If he/she widens his/her horizon even further, probing several cultures and groups, he/she will see how really small the differences between communities are. It will be great after all the exploration to return to the Qur'an and restudy it with the new insights. One will then see how deluded any people are who claim to have a privileged place in heaven or on earth; he/she will come to appreciate Qur'anic verses like, "Both the Jews and Christians say: 'We are sons of God, and His beloved;'" (5:18) a Muslim will then come to see that if he/she takes himself/herself to have a special relation to God, then he/she is no better than the Christians or Jews.

You Are Mere Humans

Nations and cultural systems are grossly deluded and barred from seeing the truth about themselves. And so they need so many examples about themselves and about others to see how they fare in comparison with other nations and cultures. One telling example must be Satan: he was the first to boast that he was created from fire, while Adam was created from a baser material, mud. So, it would be useful for people to reflect that pride about one's race or ethnic group or culture is walking in the steps of Satan. Therefore, those who raised themselves and claimed to be "sons of God, and His beloved ," were told, as the same verse continues, "Why then does He punish you for your sins?

Nay, you are but men – of the men He has created." (5:18) So, Muslims who claim to be privileged with God, would do well to reflect how painful a scourge God has inflicted on them over the recent history: this must awaken them to the fact that they are mere men, and that the laws that apply to others apply to them. Do not Muslims still claim that no followers of any religion will be admitted into Paradise but they, the Muslims? Do not they still claim that all the ideas and deeds of other nation are of no value at all?

Do not we mock those who issued indulgences, guarantees that warrant Paradise to certain individuals? So why assume that we may claim to be favorites with God? We have a big claim that God is on our side, although He shows us again and again that his laws apply to all humans alike, "No change will you find in Allah's way of dealing: no turning off will you find in Allah's way of dealing." (35:43) No matter how long we cling to our deluded notions, history will not give up and change its laws: it is rather we who will change our attitudes, with or without more suffering.

People can open their eyes and ears and so understand. But if they refuse, then the increasingly higher price of ignorance will force them to understand. So, it is either we study past history to understand, or wait until more catastrophes and suffering make us understand. And if our generation is already too blinded to see light, there will be in the next generation or the one next to it enough light. To save people from that great toll of ignorance, the Qur'an is full of exhortation to explore history and move around to see and hear. (e.g. 25:38-45)

It may be useful to notice that an important ruling like that of inheritance is not mentioned more than two or three times in the Qur'an; but how often in contrast it admonishes us to walk around and see the outcome of past people's conduct, and in one location it comments: "To each one We set forth parables and examples, and each one We broke to utter annihilation for their sins." (25:39) See how often the history of Pharaoh and Moses is mentioned in the Qur'an, in great detail, in some detail, or in brief.

It is worth our while to probe what happened to our minds that we can be impervious to the historical narration of the Qur'an despite its significance. We vitally need to bring life back to events. Why should we go on paying higher and higher toll for our ignorance?

The law in the Qur'an concerning what happens to peoples and their responsibility is, "Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls," (13:11) which shows that what is inside the minds determines what events come over peoples. And what is in the minds is men's responsibility.

It was Ibn Khaldoun who taught us that history, "on the surface is no more than events that happen to nations; but looking deeply, we find behind the visible events causes and effects; we find guidelines that tell us why something happens." People used to attribute what happened to them to their gods, but the gods are no more than what goes on inside the minds. Therefore, when the unbelievers reacted to the Prophet's call by saying, as the Qur'an reports, "When they see you, they treat you no otherwise than in mockery: 'Is this the one whom Allah has sent as a Messenger? He indeed would well-nigh have misled us from our gods, had it not been that we were constant to them!'" (25:41-42) you could say that they were talking not about their gods but about their mental habits and attitudes.

And we can say about ourselves that when we raise God most highly, we also raise our ideas very highly, and hold to them most tenaciously. What you hold about your god, and about history, will guide you, rightly or wrongly. It is not enough to say, 'I believe in the One True God,' if what is inside your mind about life and the world is not so unlike what the idol-worshipper holds. If the others, those who explicitly declare that they strive for success in this world act in accordance with God's laws "the *sunan* in Qur'an's terms", while we do not, then they will attain their quests while we do not, no matter how we boast that we believe in God and His revealed message.

And indeed, the behavior that ensures your salvation (as community) in the Hereafter is itself what ensures your salvation in this world.

The Visible Events and the Events Inside the Minds

The contents of our minds, whatever we name them, and all the symbols and ideas we hold most dear to us – they determine what happens to us.

Now what happens to people can be equally deemed good or bad unless we examine the benefits and harm they cause. But how can we perceive that unless we study God's laws which will not change to please us or to please any other people. One of the starting points is to notice that a human may often see good what is bad and see bad what is good. It is very unlikely that a human will come to know himself/herself without comparison and contrast, exactly as we use a mirror to see our face. To begin with, one needs to be less sure of the truthfulness of what he believes to be true. It is the events of history, what happens in the real world – it is by analyzing all that that puts us right. To examine how right or wrong our ideas and thought are, our criterion is the outcome of our conduct, which is based on our ideas and thoughts. And the outcome of conduct can happen in the short-run or the long-run. Moreover, what happens to groups is governed by laws other than what happens to individuals. The life-span of groups is different from that of individuals. Indeed, some events do not show their outcome until after centuries.

I sometimes ask the simple people in our village if they were in a stationary vehicle and there was another vehicle, also stationary, but in the opposite direction; and then if one of the vehicles moved, how did they know which one had moved? And they think of a post or a tree next to one of the cars, or of a third car; they tell me it is by looking at that third object that they can determine which car has moved. And I tell them the point is that when we are involved in a comparison between nations, groups, creeds, etc. we need a referential point outside the contesting groups. This may help us appreciate how badly we need history. As long we think of ourselves and our adversaries we may not be in a position to see with any justice where we stand in comparison with the other. But it is by reviewing many experiences that we acquire this ability to see with some justice.

As I say this I am mindful of many modern philosophies that have reached an impasse; they feel they have hit against a solid wall, being unable to tell the difference between right and wrong, good and bad – a quite nihilistic attitude. Foucault is the glaring example here.

I am also aware of many individuals who say, and they have said it often in my hearing, that history is no more than a pack of lies. They say that as they take history to be what people say about themselves. They forget for instance that the Soviet Union's history is not what it used to say about itself; its history is its outcome. And the world will come to witness what happened to it; it will explode all the falsehood for it or against it. Nor is the history of America what the Americans say about themselves; the reality about them will come out, and history will make note of the outcome of American behaviors. We have the facts about the Pharaohs, and the facts about the Umayyads, and about the Abbasids; We do know how different all their behavior is from when Abraham erected the Ka'bah, [the holy cubic structure of Mecca] together with his son Ishmael! Their deed is open to analysis, to ascertain what good they did to humankind.

History is not how Nietzsche saw it, as the oldest lie! It demonstrates God's greatness, as we review how a human has fared in the world. And those who see nothing about a human but his/her trespasses are far deluded. Those who think of nothing but the mischief and the bloodshed are far too cynical. They do not see the rise and ascent.

Islam deems pessimism to be equal to disbelief (See the Qur'an, 12:87). It is so since when one is despondent, he has no reason to go ahead. You will see it in his eyes. So, why should we see in a human's life nothing but the first few months when it soiled itself, and could not clean itself; a human is more than that. I am aware of the many who think of history as nonsense, but let us go ahead and see better than that. The world is really going up and ahead, and it will not halt; it will keep going and rising. It is as the Qur'an says, "the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of men remains on the earth." (13:17) The facts that seem hard for us to

comprehend will come to be understood more fully, with all their details and applications. It is fortunate that a new trend has emerged in historical studies like the annals studies, in which the historians realize that they need to view things in their widest scope, to extend their look as far temporally and spatially as possible. They are coming to view things nearly as well as the prophets saw them. Let us remember what Jesus Christ said. "For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes." (Luke, 6:44) He was speaking of the false prophets and the true prophets, but it is also the criterion for history. The Qur'an has something precious about this, for it describes how what happens to peoples is the result of what goes on inside their souls, and then it asserts, "the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of man remains on the earth." (13:17)

We have another example to ponder. Nothing is clearer than the sun; is not that so? But has not the sun been for so many centuries the object of delusion when people took it to be revolving around the earth, and not the other way round? And men were ready to die, and to send others to death, rather than accept this fact; which turned out to be most evident and obvious. The example is as glaring as the sun is glaring. It must teach us that what we seem to believe to be true beyond any shred of doubt can be false.

From the sun we may now go to history and say that we often are deluded there; we often do not understand the movements of history rightly. If we remember "Let there be no compulsion in religion," (2:256) we may realize that no good can come from imposing ideas and convictions. To feel secure about your convictions, let the others be secure about their convictions, no matter how convinced you are of your own convictions. Is it not a mercy that men have come to accept that they should let others come to live next to them despite all the differences in persuasion. It is a blessing that did not exist some time ago. But, it makes sense, for when you give the other the right to live despite the difference in ideas, you expect the other to give you the same right. It is such a major change, that you can be in error, but we let you be. You have good reason then to expect that the other views you in the same way.

What is inside our minds will determine our conduct, but what we think to be right will not change the facts of the world. This is as it should be, for, as the Qur'an says, "If the Truth had been in accord with their desires, truly the heavens and the earth, and all beings therein, would have been in confusion." (23:71) People still hold that it is the politicians who shape the life of societies through the edicts that they issue. But it is the same as when men were so sure that the sun revolved round the earth. However, there *is* a difference between the two situations: Whereas the sun and the stars are not influenced by what we think about them, the politicians are happy or unhappy for what we think of them. They will also abandon a certain policy in response to change in their nation's attitudes and ideas. This is important in understanding the law of history and how it progresses. It is vital to perceive how the nations can really direct their politician by merely changing their expectations. It is an entirely different world, that of dealing with things in the way of Adam's son. Conflict that revolves on the axis of persuasion is very unlike that which revolves on coercion.

The point is how to get to the right-guided kind of life. It is ever more tempting to condemn the other and to absolve oneself; while the Qur'an's way is to look inside, to act on the principle that we change what belongs to us, our ways of thinking, our norms, our attitudes, and God will change our condition. It must be fully realized that if in dealing with the world we fail in any endeavor, it is because we do not know enough to have control. Let it be a quite settled fact in our mind that the problem is not having acquired the abilities to solve the problem we confront and not that it is unsolvable.

There is a basis for this in our religious faith: we have to realize that God did not just create the world and that is all. The act of creation is a process that continues until now, and will continue in the future. This links to the principle mentioned above, that "the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of man remains on the earth;" (13:17) that what is good and right will stay, and what is froth and useless will disappear. This fact may be noticed in the Qur'an,

but may also be noticed if you walk around and observe how creation was started and has progressed. Remember that there was a time when humans ate human flesh (and a small residue of humankind may still do!) Unless we fully realize how we were in past history, we will not appreciate where we have got, and what the possibilities for the future are.

Do you appreciate how many studies we need in this direction to keep up our growth, and to ensure that we do not regress and ruin what has been accomplished. Men have given great attention to physical health, and have started to give some attention to mental health. Do not believe the claim that the world is getting worse all the time, even when the advocates of such claim support it with certain traditions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, which are very selectively chosen (and some are not authentic) to support a point. It is unfortunate that our cultural atmosphere is so saturated with despondent notions, among the lower echelons of society as well as among the highest echelons! It is a mistake to keep throwing words in that direction without hesitation. How can one work with any earnestness if one has no hope in a brighter future! The Qur'an teaches otherwise, "anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, shall see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it;" (99:7), and "if any think that Allah will not help him in this world and Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to the ceiling and cut himself off: then let him see whether his plan will remove that which enrages him!" (22:15) It is to be noted in this last verse that victory is promised in this world.

I have devoted my life to revealing this new world, the rightly-guided world. I have well learned my lesson from Iqbal, the great poet, who imagines himself to be acting for bringing into being that world which he envisions in his dream. He sees himself to be drawing his energy from the words of *adhan* (the call to prayer) which invigorates him to build up that world which he envisions.

One point noticed by Iqbal is that the Qur'an was for many centuries viewed through the prism of the old paradigm of history, as a series of wonders and miracles, while the Qur'an itself was a harbinger of a new age when humankind would deal with life not on the basis of wonders and marvels, but on the basis of laws. Is it not a major enlightenment perceived by this giant among thinkers? The way of miracles and wonders is the way of dark mysteries, and the way of laws is the way of science and light. And any researcher can see that we are still governed by thinking on the basis of wonders, very often including our brightest minds, and even the secularists! And you see how when we like a politician we attribute some miraculous gifts to him, and when we dislike him we find him to be somehow of Jewish extraction!

A virus can afflict the body with serious disease, so how many mental viruses do we have? How long will it take us to accept the way of Adam's son, when he proved to be an honor to the species of humankind, an honor to Adam who was taught, "the nature of [and naming of] all things." (2: 31) It is more knowledge that can bring us again to the way of right-guided life, and the establishment of righteous life. But for this to happen, we need to give up glorifying ignorance and dreading knowledge.

Dreading Knowledge

Michele Foucault asserted in *The System of Discourse* that the modern human still dreads knowledge, that he/she has "a very deep scare of the 'logos'" in his words. This fear of knowledge will not go away as long as we are engaged in this game of the master and the slave; we are very deeply wary of accepting the equality of men. Accepting dealing on a footing of equality will do away with the oppressor, and it will also do away with the oppressed, but we are still trapped in this vicious circle. But can we just decide to walk out of the circle? There was a time in our history when we stopped this game of the oppressor and the oppressed, but alas not for long! But can we now achieve this breaking of the sinister link?

It is both an easy step and a most arduous one. We may understand history as an overarching power that would not give us respite. But the change is really within reach, for God did not create a human to be another passive creation. If a human fails to learn from the toll already paid, then he/she will have to learn from more, and perhaps much higher, toll. The problem is that so far one does not give up being oppressed but to be an oppressor. Men fail to perceive a third alternative: men as equals. It is something like magic that blinds men's eyes to the facts, and I do realize that the prophets had to pay so dearly for attempting to lift the scales from men's eyes, and they were charged with being mad. So anyone of us who tries now to undo the magic can be easily charged with madness. But the attempt is worth the risk. Is not pulling humankind out of their quagmire of idolatry worth much? Indeed, at this time humankind is just pushed towards this new era of liberation. And yet it is no easy feat to make men see possible what they see as impossible!

The thing that Adam's son achieved is remarkable. He succeeded in getting out of the game of the oppressor and the oppressed, the killer and the killed, the dominant and the dominated. It is as you see the same game, whether one is the first party or the second party. Whether one manages to be the first party or succumbs to be the second, he is perpetuating the situation, and giving it legitimacy. And he is doing it even when he climbs to be the higher party, or falls to be the lower one. And there will be no democracy finding its way to a land where this game of the dominant and dominated does not come to an end.

Have I delivered my message to even a handful of persons? Or do they still take me to be crazy? Honestly I do not see that the message has really settled in the minds of even a handful of persons. But I do not lose hope. For even stones will be affected by the drops of water. The Qur'an tells us about that, "For among rocks there are some from which rivers gush forth; others there are which when split asunder send forth water." (2:74). Nor is this situation too far off. I do remember when I wrote my first book, *The Way of Adam's son*, (in the mid-sixties of last century) some of my best friends took me to task for it. "You discourage the dedicated Muslims from offering what they can," they said (meaning that without tyrants' fear of some violence, they will not correct their ways.) But I remember how, twenty years after that, one of those critics came to say, "You know, I did speak against that book, but now I see that it is the only way!"

We need to have faith, faith enough to carry us through this long process of transferring people from misguidance to guidance; we need, too, to express things clearly enough, as the Qur'an says, "Truth stands out clear from error." (2:256) I do realize how challenging this quest is: this verse, which Muslims take the first part of, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" to be abrogated, I undertake the task of making it abrogating not abrogated.

What really this endeavor implies is a new perspective on faith: that to be a real believer, you must accept to stand on equal footing with the other. Let what you believe in and what the other believes in be measured by the same test, the test of the benefits and the harm of convictions, as the Qur'an says, "the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of humankind remains on earth," (13:17) and "Not your desires, nor those of the People of the Book can prevail: whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly." (4:123) It is history that is to give the verdict on our acts. The truth of our verbally declaring, 'There is no god but God' will be seen in our own life. It will help us that the belief in one God is something inborn in humans.

It is one aspect of belief in the one God that He is the One Creator. This aspect seems now to be unanimously agreed upon: no one would now claim that he has a hand in the act of creation. Idolatry in this connection is seen when some people claim that they are the intercessors between men and God; and when some people find some good dead men to be their intercessors with God.

There is another aspect of the Oneness of God about which people often err: that the final word belongs to God and to no one else. Pharaoh would not let people choose for themselves – they were forced to take him as the one who must be obeyed. This type of idolatry survives.

I say this to draw the reader's attention to the connection between two verses of the Qur'an: the Qur'an's greatest verse, as is generally acknowledged, is verse 2:255 "Allah! There is no god but

He – the Living, …" and the verse immediately next to it, "Let there be no compulsion in religion; Truth stands out clear from error," for faith in the One God, with the submission to the One God, is not accepted unless one accepts it with conviction. One will not have embraced religion without doing it whole-heartedly.

Another thing is that one may have faith, but faith in a wrong belief. It seems that most people are not aware of this fact, that those who believe can be believers in something right or wrong. Nor is the readiness to sacrifice life or wealth a proof of the rightness of one's faith!

Therefore we say that the only criterion of the rightness of what one believes is experience and history, the law of "the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of humankind remains on earth." (13:17) Add to this that what is right and good at one time does not have to be right and good at another time. Hence, time becomes a factor in deeming something to be right or wrong, beneficial or harmful, good or bad.

Now we can better appreciate that God's signs come in the form of verses of His scriptures, and come in the form of the facts of history and the signs of the universe around us. And the Qur'an accepts the signs of the world, the visible signs, to be the witness that it is the true book. Despite this fact, Muslims have not given history its real value. They will not look with any seriousness at the facts of the Soviet Union, or the European Union – as if things do not happen in accordance with laws, and as if the laws that apply to others have nothing to do with us.

Guidance and Misguidance

Can we really find in history an inspiration about guidance and misguidance? Guidance is a synonym of 'no compulsion in religion and opinions', and misguidance is a synonym of 'compulsion in religion and opinions.' And compulsion is not confined to any particular religion; it has rather to do with a human himself/herself: it is a human who does the compulsion, and it is a human who can be prey to compulsion. We need to explore history to ascertain the first seed of compulsion, who imposed it, and who was the victim? And what happens to the characters of both? Is this not a beautiful topic to work on?

What I am doing here is not a study, but some leads to whet the appetite of young men and young women to study. For the problems of Muslims are so numerous that the more layers you remove, you find more layers.

Let us for instance reflect if guidance (as in the verse "Truth 'or guidance' stands out clear from evil 'or misguidance'" 2:256) has really been distinguished from misguidance. I say it has. And it is those who know the history of a human and his/her nature, who study the progress of history – it is these who can discriminate guidance from misguidance. Muslims will come to see that a no-compulsion policy is right-guided policy, and that compulsion is misguidance. The elimination of compulsion in faith and opinion will mark major development in the history of humankind. Only history can teach us these facts. How sublime this task of protecting man's free choice of his faith is: it is continuing the prophets' work. We should see this in the Qur'an, too. The Qur'an teaches Muslims this policy, "Allah does not forbid you, with regard to those who do not fight you for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just. Allah only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for your faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support others in driving you out, from turning to them for friendship and protection. It is such as turn to them, in these circumstances, that do wrong." (60:8-9)

Seeing things in this light will make us realize that a well-guided society is one where all the various opinions and faiths are upheld freely, openly and not clandestinely; except for those who intimidate others or force them out of their homes or convictions. When we understand this, and refer to the above-quoted verses (60:8-9), we can see that harassing people here to abandon their religion is not just about other religions, but about any religion, including harassing people to

convert to Islam. And this means we must announce distancing ourselves from any person who uses violence in proselytizing people, even if it is to Islam.

From this it must be clear that the party of the prophets' followers are worshippers of God; and the idolaters are those who serve any associate beside God; the first party use no compulsion, and the latter party resort to compulsion. Any one who resorts to compulsion is acting in contradiction with the belief in the one God.

Have I expatiated long on the topic of right guidance and misguidance? If I have overdone it, it is because we often practice misguidance when we pride ourselves on being well-guided. And we may sacrifice even our life and wealth for the sake of a misguided or deluded endeavor which we take to be righteous. It is easy to see how much was sacrificed for false causes. It is so strange that people do not even wish to stop and reconsider the practices followed by other people, even those who are counted the brightest and most enlightened.

Paradoxically, however, despite all the darkness, there remained traces of coherence in the minds of the simple Muslim. One sign of this coherence is naming the four Caliphs after the Prophet 'the Upright Caliphs *'al-Rashidoon* in Arabic': They are the caliphs who rose to the position without compulsion. That in contrast with all the later rulers, who acceded to their position by force. It is to be noted that Muslims never called a ruler who attained his place through compulsion 'an upright ruler'. It is a very good, and intuitive, insight.

But we need to follow guidance and misguidance through their manifestations in history. We need to look well to perceive how guidance does go ahead and gains ground, goes slow but sure; and how history is advancing towards good guidance, though very slowly. We have not reached the day when the angels' prediction that a human will do mischief and spill blood (as in 2:30) is falsified by humankind's conduct. And when we are not allowed to practice compulsion in the most sacred thing, religion, then we are not allowed to practice it in lesser things, as in the case of politics, doctrines, and persuasions. As people believe or disbelieve inside their minds, and as we have no access to that, then if you compel someone to agree with you, you are inducing him/her to be a hypocrite.

We have also to repeat that what is right now is not necessarily so for ever; the process of renewal of creation does not stop, and so something more upright comes up and abrogates what used to be the best but is no longer the best. What used to be good stuff will be froth at a later stage, and it will be pushed aside and replaced. The general progress of history is going towards what is better and meritorious.

When hardworking scholars rise to explore history and examine the causes of progress and regression, and when a lot of good studies are made available to people, this will accelerate the advance of history. No despair will settle in as long as the light of the future is brought to the notice of the best minds.

In the case of the Muslim world, we did enjoy a spate of good guidance, at the time of the Upright Caliphs, but then all the chaos and scramble for power took sway, and submerged any sense of a more sober life. Is it not deplorable that the bright minds did not even feel the need to explore this unfortunate decline?

CHAPTER THREE

TWO READINGS OF THE QUR'AN

What I put forth in this chapter is not quite new. I did put forward a few ideas about it in an early book of mine, *Until They Change What Is in Their Souls*. It is a discussion of two readings of the Qur'an.

We may read the Qur'an on the assumption that the events of history are brought about by God; and we may read the Qur'an on the assumption that the events of history are brought about by humankind, and that what happens is their responsibility. A scholar as distinguished as Muhammad Arkoun declares that the Qur'an asserts that history is shaped by God and not by humans, not even by prophets and reformers. When the confusion has reached this level I feel the urgency of taking it up.

So let us begin with this example from the Qur'an, "Do you see that seed that you sow in the ground? Is it you that cause it to grow, or are We the Cause?" (56:63-64) and "Do you see then the human seed that you throw out? Is it you who create it, or are We the Creators?" (56:58-59)

Indeed, it is God who created the trees, but then it is a human who arranged the orchard. And again, it is God who created humans, but without marriage, we would not have children. There is here something that belongs to God, and something that belongs to a human; in one aspect the thing is done by God, and in one aspect it is done by a human.

It is God who has laid down the law, and it is a human who puts the law to use.

So let us move from this to the events of history. About any historical event, and about any change we may notice, we say that it is God who creates the events of history, but He does that as men choose to apply His laws. Here again, in any event, there is one aspect that belongs to God, and there is an aspect that belongs to humankind. God does bring about the change, but upon a human doing the causes.

It is something that Muslims should learn, these two readings of the Qur'an, and they should teach them to their children. We need this so that our children and we ourselves do not hold some people as holy. Unless people understand, they will hold some false and bad ideas about God and His signs, and will hold some persons as having a special relationship with God. Deluded, they will undervalue their own efforts.

We have locations in the Qur'an where both aspects to events are mentioned together, as in "Because Allah will never change the Grace which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in their own souls," (8:53), and "Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is in their own souls." (13:11)

About any blessing that people enjoy, good health, wealth, a life of cooperation in what is pious and good – all such bounties follow laws; and people do well by abiding by the laws to enjoy the blessings. When the verse says, "Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is in their own souls," (13:11) there is something to be done by humans for God to bring about the change they desire. Holding very tightly to the above verse is vital, as it does away with much of our blundering and confusion.

We need to fully understand the relationship between the two sides in the verse. If you say that God has granted health, wealth, and cooperation to a people, we must understand that all that has come about since the people concerned had acquired the attitudes, concepts, values, and convictions that merit God's endowing them with what He endows. And, in the same way, when

God afflicts a people with poverty, disease, hatred and the like, it is not without their having had the attitudes, concepts, values, and convictions that match the afflictions that have hit them.

In other locations of the Qur'an, we may have one aspect only, as in "Say: 'O Allah! Lord of Power and Rule, You give power to whom You please, and strip off power from whom You please: You endue with honor whom You please, and You bring low whom You please: in Your Hands is all good. Verily, over all things You have power." (3:26) Let us not imagine that God gives status, wealth, and fertility haphazardly. Whenever we read the above verse, for instance, let us simultaneously remember, "But Allah did not wrong them: nay, they wronged their own souls." (16:33)

And so on. When we read that God brought together the Prophet's companions' hearts in love, let us understand that they realized the qualities that deserved that bounty.

It may be useful to admit that the effort that humans put in is so tiny in comparison with the bounty that God endows them with; and that is as it should be, for we know how immense God's bounty is. But notwithstanding the modesty of people's effort, it must be done before the sometimes astonishing result is granted. See for instance the creation of an infant – how marvelous it is! And how humble a human's part is in comparison with the result! But that small part that is a human's should be done before the infant is conceived, which does not prevent the Qur'an from marveling at the splendor of God's creation.

The Qur'an and Attributing Trespasses to God's Will

The Qur'an scolds those who deny their responsibility for their sins, "Those who give partners to Allah will say: 'If Allah had wished, we should not have given partners to Him, nor would our fathers; nor should we have had any taboos.'" (6:148) They claim that it is God's will that they attribute associates to Him, but the verse goes on to say, "So did their ancestors argue falsely, until they tasted of Our wrath. Say: 'Have you any certain knowledge? If so, produce it before us. You follow nothing but conjecture: you do nothing but lie.'" (6:148) It may be noted that this latter half of the verse has several things to say about the various ways of justification that those people are using: that what they say is not unlike what people used to say in the past, so they may just look at history and see; that such practice would only cause destruction and suffering "until they tasted of Our wrath"; that those people do not put forth any concrete evidence for their behavior " Have you any certain knowledge? If so, produce it before us," that what those people say is claims that are based on only whims and desires.

The words of the next verse are also important, "Say: 'With Allah is the argument that reaches home: if it so had been His Will, He could indeed have guided you all,'" (6:149) for if people are led astray they must not think that they do it against God's will or in spite of Him. God is able to make people just behave as is ordained for them, and the sun and moon and stars prove that it is easy for God to do so; but it is His will that a human should bear the responsibility. (I devoted a whole book to this idea, *Until They Change that Which Is in Their Own Souls*, but I do not claim, either about that book or about this, that I have exhausted this topic. More and more researches must be written about it.) The point is that God will not change people's condition unless and until they change proportionate things in their thoughts, attitudes, values, convictions, etc.

But unfortunately many people would not come to embracing truth by considering the correctness of what they are admonished to consider. They would not believe until they have suffered enough to awaken.

How much good I expect the young men and young women to do if they take up such topics and elaborate on them. Not only research and exploration! We need courses to be run, and numbers of people to attend to have their way of viewing things transformed into something more enlightened. Indeed, thinking of the future helps me be hopeful. I can imagine how when people take up these ideas, they will have peace in their heart, the peace of right guidance, in the same way

as Abraham realized, and declared it, "It is those who believe and do not confuse their beliefs with wrong – that are truly in security, for they are on right guidance." (6:82) And people will wonder then how it was not clear to our generation.

It helps us a lot to think of the time we were right-guided, and the way we came to lose right-mindedness.

Toynbee has something relevant here. He describes how civilization starts with the creative elite. This group has found the simple solutions, solutions that save effort and time, and they lead society with the creative tunes on their flute. During this period they can tap the best abilities of society, to mobilize people for the best objectives. But later on, the results do not match the efforts expended; there is major disproportion between the amount of effort and the result of this effort. Now there will be a decline and then collapse in civilization. People's eagerness to put in effort relaxes, and they are less willing to work hard: of course they would not be willing, for the elite no longer produce creative and fruitful solutions. And now, the flute in the hand of the elite is changed into a stick or whip for beating people into marching ahead. So he determines the time of decline and collapse as when the creative elite has been metamorphosed into a dominant and tyrannical elite.

God gives us the example of the blessed effort: it is compared to a grain that produces seven stalks, each bearing a hundred grains (2:261). And we can see this in reality; how some nations put in a great deal of effort, hardly reaping enough to reward their effort; while other nations' work is rewarded with great results.

God has created the world to be in the service of a human, and to employ the world you need to know the way to brining out its potential at the minimum effort. We have to take responsibility for bringing out the children's potentials. A human must be accountable for what happens to him/her, "Truly he succeeds that purifies it [his soul], and he fails that corrupts it," as the Qur'an says (91:9-10).

Has not the human discovered electricity and found in it a great source of energy? Why do not we discover the great energy of having the right-guided thinking? Do not we like to get out of a life of chaos, aberration, hatred and oppression? Is not the way open to that good thinking? Indeed, there is a difference between the discovery of electricity and the discovery of right-mindedness. For we need for the latter to discover a human, the potentials of this paragon of creation, a creature that can be 'in the best of moulds ' or 'the lowest of the low' (as in the Qur'an, 95:4, and 5). It is indeed deplorable that a human's growth is frustrated and stunted; he/she has the ability to go ahead and be creative. People lived so many millenniums before agriculture, and lived many millenniums before domesticating animals, and then they had control here and there; but now they need to cross this threshold of misguidance into good guidance. We need first to understand how it settled in our minds that the right policy in dealing with a human is to use the stick. How it happened that we seem antagonistic to exploration and acquiring knowledge; how we do not feel attracted to delving into the mysteries of things; how we seem not be curious about the hidden secrets; why we do not know how we stunt the child's growth, how we stifle his/her curiosity, how we stifle the love of exploration and the unearthing of mysteries. Is it not the most splendid faculty of a human's that we kill? It is strange how we think of extracting all there is to extract from animals and plants and earth, but try hard to prevent a human being from offering what he/she can offer? Why do we impede progress? What makes us inspire the individual to believe that things cannot be changed? Why do we instill into minds that a human will always change to more chaos, destruction and mischief? It is teaching the positive and creative and going up and ahead that the Qur'an expects of us when it calls to '*rashad*, right-mindedness.'

A Human and Awareness About History

Most people grow and get old and die without having awakened that yearning for integration; most die before they have experienced even once the exhilaration of learning the story of human history. But how can we kindle that ecstasy in the hearts of many young men and young women? To bring this about is not really an act of magic. How will it dawn on them that humankind keeps correcting itself as time passes? To perceive the march of history is such a marvelous thing that it fills the heart with elation. Do not you see what it means to see the difference between seeing things happen at random and seeing the possibility of taking the change in hand and steering change to a more fruitful and profitable direction?

That the truth dawns on even one mind is a precious thing, and the Qur'an treats it as such (as in 40:28 and the following verses; and in 36:20-21) Such individual achievements might be ignored in history, but not in the Qur'an. When you learn the precedents, it gives you a great incentive for future achievement. And what is history but a retaining of the good and elimination of the harmful or disadvantageous?

Maybe it is clear by now that history is not a fulfillment of your or my fancies – it works by its own laws; and we have to go there to see the facts, and not to bring facts to fit our own fancies. It is true that so many people will try to twist the facts to fit their desire, but history will go ahead along its own course. As it does, it will make more and more distinction between what is right and what is wrong, between truth and falsehood. The only correct attitude to history is to realize that the truth is not what I think is true, but what history says is true. And of course the measure of anything's truth in history is the amount of good it brings about. The Qur'an accepts the result of something to be the criterion for its truth. A person who does not judge things according to the good or bad they realize will only be guided by his fancy and desire. The Qur'an's lesson is precious here: take history to be your reference of truth.

I feel that I cannot say enough about the importance of this rule, that things are to be judged by their outcome. History teaches us so, and the Qur'an teaches us so. But even after repeating and reiterating, I feel that it will be long before people finally digest this lesson. Do not you see that God accepts this law to apply to Him and to His prophets – That the actual events of history are the reference? This shows you how grave the Muslims' mistake is in ignoring the facts of history, that is, the results of behaviors! How far they are from the Qur'an's handling of the events of history as a real lab of truth and falsehood! They still say that history is no more than a pack of lies, and the Qur'an deems it to be the guide to truth and a better life. Of course people will persist in denying the value of history as long as they are ignorant of it. Once they know, they will take history to be a temple for worshipping God through a study of His creation.

We know that a human is accountable on the Day of Judgment for what he/she has done, but history shows a human that he/she is accountable in this world, before he/she encounters the more serious judgment in the Hereafter. Does this make us appreciate how huge a role history plays? It is no less than the Creator's law court, where people's acts are tried and sentences are given concerning each case. This is also what I meant when I said above that the Qur'an is readable from two different perspectives – now it may be seen that history is brought into being by God, but only in response to the values, norms, thoughts, and delusions of the participant agents.

Well, granted that we are convinced of the importance of history, how do we enter this temple? How can we contrast the building of the pyramids of Egypt with Abraham's building the Ka'bah, the Holy House in Mecca? Was not Abraham the one who set the reference for telling the truth from falsehood, as we see in this dialogue reported in the Qur'an, "And rehearse to them something of Abraham's story. Behold , he said to his father and his people: 'What do you worship?' They said: 'We worship idols, and we remain constantly in attendance on them.' He said: 'Do they listen to you when you call on them, or do you good or harm?' They said: 'Nay, but we found our fathers doing this that we do.'" (26:70-74) For them, the way to judge is not to examine what benefit or harm something causes: if it was accepted by their fathers and forefathers, then it was good. Is not this same justification used by many nations – that something is good or bad in so far as the

forefathers saw it to be so. While the criterion for Abraham was that what is true is what realizes benefits, and what is false is what is harmful.

We may not deny, however, that what the past generations left us is partly true. Otherwise, we should always start from the time humans were in the caves. Of course, there is a golden mean here: how can we learn all there is to learn from the past generations, without their becoming a millstone round our necks that bends us down? Is it not Abraham, our great father, who taught us to stop sacrificing a human being, when he offered an animal instead? No wonder that God says, as we see in the Qur'an, "We bestowed aforetime on Abraham his rectitude of conduct." (21:51) The point is that we do not want to throw away the baby with the dirty water. When we fail to distinguish truth from falsehood, God will do the distinction, for history will sift things, and what is good will stay and what is harmful will be washed away.

What we have in Abraham's experience with his people, when he set the rule for distinguishing what is true as being what is beneficial, and what is false as being what is harmful; this experience is putting to work God's law, "Thus Allah by parables throws forth Truth and vanity. For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth. Thus Allah sets forth parables." (13:17)

The rule here is that without writing we would not have had history, and without history, the actual events, the writing will lose its worth. I need to know all this as I try to lay the basis for a new trend in thinking, to evaluate science and knowledge; I need to pry well, to be nearer the truth. I have to keep an eye on the Scripture and an eye on the events of history.

We need also to put in something here. Everybody knows about the profitable and harmful results when dealing with things whose results appear at once or very quickly. A child will soon learn to keep clear from fire after he burns his/her hand; but it is when a long time elapses between cause and effect that people lose sight of what led to what. It is this losing sight of the link between cause and effect that leads people to disregard history.

The spans in history are not the same as the spans in the life of individuals. It is a different cycle. Of course we have the cycles in the electron, but how different they are from the cycles in galaxies! And, moving to human life, we know about the deferral of gratification, and how we use it to rank civilizations and cultures.

I need to keep track of the way of Adam's son, but without history we cannot support the simple statement about the way of Adam's son. Now history used to be very slow, and then it picked speed, so that now the span between an event and its results can be very short. You may be sure of how important history is from the fact that once people took note of it, they no longer needed another book to be revealed from God. The Qur'an alerts us to that when it says about a certain episode of history, "There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding;" (12:111) and more generally, "Take warning, then, O you with eyes to see!" (59:2) So let those who do not give history its worth suffer its blows; blows in the form of tears, blood, and the lamentations of parents, sisters, and children! You see how the people who know nothing about history spend hordes of money on worthless projects, instead of investing more in knowledge, knowledge and science and an in-depth study of religion.

The problem is that we not only wade in our ignorance, but we even are too terrified to enter the domain of knowledge. Is that what we think about God, that should we learn more about truth we would be farther from God? I know I have come close to truth, but can I touch it?

Where Are You, Bilal?

Come Bilal, and tell people about you! Can we learn how you did what you did? Are you a miracle? What got into you as soon as you believed in Islam? What induced you to make that difficult decision? And you just a slave! I feel the need to delve and dive to know you. To bring your conduct to life is a great revival of the dead. To learn your way is to give up the idols, and to get

over terror, and to inspire a feeling of security into hearts. But to do that, we need to transfer Bilal from the domain of legend to the domain of reality and concrete existence. We need to understand how in Bilal was epitomized the way of the prophets. O Bilal, you seem to be a very phantom who is encased in mystery; quite an enigma; for we do not seem to have access to your treasure.

But no, Bilal is within our reach; he is not impossible. We only need to understand him. The blacks need to learn from this black man, and those who yearn to be free need to learn from this slave (when he was a slave), and the most brilliant economists need to learn from this economist what is gain and what is loss; for Bilal teaches us how to train a human and completely transform him/her with the minimum of waste. But do people understand the power in you? Did Bilal happen by coincidence like the first fire that happened in nature? And if something happens naturally like the first fire or the natural electricity, can we not produce it deliberately and according to plan? This will help us take Bilal's experience to be not a miraculous event, but something that may come to be reproduced. Humankind has discovered the secret of fire, and has kindled it at will. And so can they acquire and train others to acquire traits deliberately and follow well-known steps once they learn how to develop those traits. And when we succeed with some we succeed with many, for mental good health is contracted, not the same as with physical good health.

When some individuals stand for truth, falsehood has no way of withstanding them; it is God's will that once truth advances, falsehood retreats, "And say: 'Truth has now arrived, and Falsehood perished: for Falsehood is by its nature bound to perish.'" (17:81) It is unfortunate that some people would think that falsehood is ordained to vanquish truth. And it makes a world of difference to believe that truth will be victorious or that falsehood will be victorious. We have to be, as believers, optimistic rather than pessimistic, for the Qur'an tells us, "truly no one despairs of Allah's soothing Mercy, except those who have no faith;" (12:87), and "And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord, but such as go astray?" (15:56)

The world is designed so that it advances towards what is better. And it is not enough to announce that you believe in this, unless you see its truth in history. People whose vision will not extend beyond the short range of the present moment will be pessimistic; while those who view history in its totality will see the creativity and development. So look well into history; peer well, and see how the world gets broader and more extensive. Such reflection gives hope, and not hope that is engendered of fancy, but of reality; creation is not a one-time act, but a continuous process. For those who are hopeful, what is closed will open; and for those who are hopeless, what is open will appear closed.

To go ahead on the basis of knowing the laws of the history, one progresses serenely, but surely and deliberately; but to move without knowing history, one acts impulsively and precipitately. Indeed, all my effort is an attempt to make Islamic work proceed knowingly, to have vision and insight while proceeding. What I am contending is that to move in this way will cost less, and will produce more. But it will not be an easy option at the beginning. My mentors have been Muhammad Iqbal and Malik Bennabi.

Is it madness what I am announcing? No matter; let me be charged with what many prophets were charged, for many prophets were charged with madness. But they proved to offer mercy, not destruction. They also proved to save effort and time, and to raise the value for cost ratio. And the whole universe is based on the law of mercy; the more we expand our knowledge, the more merciful we become. God Himself is the Merciful and Compassionate; and His Mercy has priority over wrath.

So why should we see torture in the world, and not mercy? Why not follow the way of the prophets and see the possibility of mercy rather than suffering? Do not you see that the animals' life is basically characterized by mercy? Do not you see the mothers? And when the prophets were sent by the Lord, they were sent to spread mercy, and to lift the burdens and fetters. They sought a society in which all are winners and no one is a loser.

The Prophets and Mercy

What happened that blinded us to the mission of prophets? What concealed from our eyes the mercy they taught so that we gave the infliction of pain first place? This is one of the things that make me say that the real age of prophets is ahead of us and not behind us. While the prophets taught people to compete in doing more good, we took up the principle of inflicting more hurt. But their principles will come to dominate. If we fail to adopt their message, there will come a generation that does uphold it and adopt it.

Of course you would not expect Muslims to bear the message of mercy to humankind, or to have much mercy for humankind, when they do not show mercy in dealings among Muslim groups. And all this has come up most glaringly in the Gulf War, our great tragedy. Is there not evidence enough in this war? Does it not refute convincingly all the big claims? All our hidden and denied malaise was brought out through this war.

We did not show mercy, not even loyalty to our next of kin and brethrens, not to mention mercy for our fellow human beings. Neither the causes were merciful, nor the so-called cure was. We really acted in flagrant defiance of all the merciful message of the prophets. We believed in destruction and eradicating man; we craved vindictively to do mischief.

The Qur'an teaches otherwise, "Those who behave arrogantly on the earth in defiance of right – I will turn them away from My Signs: Even if they see all the Signs, they will not believe in them; and if they see the way of right conduct, they will not adopt it as the Way; but if they see the way of error, that is the Way they will adopt. For they have rejected Our Signs, and failed to take warning from them." (7:146). And when we read 'I will turn them away' let us remember the two readings of the Qur'an. A human has done enough to deserve being turned away from the right way; there have been changes in the concepts and values in proportion to the torture inflicted on a human. Do we realize that very stringent laws control a human's being merciful or being hard-hearted, and that those laws are not beyond our reach? How can we learn and teach others to help the sick person to heal, and not to kill him?

Do we enjoy seeing the disease, or seeing the afflicted being eliminated? There is really no need, for no matter how hateful a person appears to us, his disease is one thing and he is another. And you see that the disease is common to all of us, so why pour our malice on the head of some individuals and groups? The tragic thing is that we do our best to protect the disease, and are ready to lay our life for perpetuating it! You know how arduous and challenging a human's struggle with viruses that attack the body is; but indeed we have a more arduous and challenging struggle with viruses that block understanding. These intellectual viruses are so elusive that they keep escaping detection. It is something like what Foucault said, "I am not where you seek me; I am here, where I stand mocking you and your search."

As Skinner comments, if Plato, Aristotle, and Gale were resurrected among us, they would not understand one page of the modern books on math, biology, or medicine; but if Socrates or Diogenes were resurrected and read some of the modern books on politics, ethics and international law, they would have no difficulty understanding them, for they will find humankind where they left it more than two millenniums ago.

It is not that in these latter spheres it is not possible to make breakthroughs? No it is not so, and some thinkers and philosophers begin to grope for something new. But somehow it scares them to suspect a new world, and they stop short.

CHAPTER FOUR

ALTRUISM AND THE EXTREME MADNESS

Foucault speaks of the psychoanalyst who explores a mental disease of his patient; his ability to do so is limited, he says. He is barred from the workings of the extreme form of madness. When Foucault tries to define that extreme form of madness, he gives it the characteristics of altruism. It is to be noted that when Foucault reaches the point of this superior state, he finds no scientific way of attaining it, on a scientific basis.

Foucault wonders whether this selflessness is the beginning of a new phase of the Western civilization. And in his analysis of this possibility, it will be clear that this excellent state lies outside the historical tradition, that it is unattainable.

Foucault's is one of the most advanced attempts in Western thought, but it is self-defeating; 'extreme madness' remains beyond the reach of humans.

Let us take this tradition of the Prophet's to study it in the light of our present discussion. The Prophet says to Abu Dhar, one of his companions, concerning what the latter is required to do in case general violent uproar rages: "Destroy your bow, break its chord; and blunt your sword by striking with it on a rock." (An authentic tradition, reported by al-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawood.) It is an authentic tradition, in the technical definition of Muslim specialists, but it has been viewed, from a cultural and intellectual perspective, as madness, perhaps extreme madness, by the whole Muslim community. It glaringly illustrates Foucault's statements about altruism, which he places as outside the domain of science and intellectual approach.

It is such considerations which made me write my book, *Read*; for I felt at the time I wrote that book, and still feel, that the intellect and knowledge as viewed by both Muslims and the West, are not the intellect and knowledge as presented in the Qur'an. It was so for I learnt my history lesson, and learnt something of its laws – I found out that it was history which sorted out the good and the bad, the beneficial and the harmful.

A simple fact this! But it is equally so easy to bypass and ignore it; and people have actually ignored it. One reason, as mentioned above, is that people can evaluate something by its consequences as long as the consequences are quick; but they do not reflect enough to evaluate things by their consequences when those consequences take a long time to materialize. It is a trait of human nature to be of little patience. Foucault did employ the pragmatic principle in analyzing history, but did this timidly and uncertainly. He expressed his caution when he said that it was not possible to make deductions from historical facts divested of any other impurities. He could not free himself from philosophies like Nietzsche's, who found all history to be just lies, and thought that the oldest of historical claims, the existence of God, as the oldest lie.

So you see how complicated the situation is, when the best minds cannot free themselves from the authority of older minds. What Foucault gives with the right hand the importance of history, he seems to withdraw it with the left hand, on account of his doubt.

Indeed the word pragmatic confuses many, including Foucault – they associate it with narrow and selfish self-seeking. Form this they raise history to an imaginary height, where it loses touch with the actual state of things here on earth. Indeed, our faith in God, in the Prophet, peace be upon him, in civilization, in culture – all this is tightly connected with the consequences of our faith in history.

The Law of the Better and More Enduring

People mix up things, and are baffled. We say that what does more good will stay, and what does harm will disappear: they take it in a narrow sense and so deny a great law. This law, however, is the basis for the improvement of life, that the more beneficial will supersede what is less beneficial. It is the law for dealing with efforts, convictions, and ideas; the law of 'the better and more enduring.' It is this law that Iqbal had in mind when, in his book *The Revival of Religious Thought* he said that the criterion for deciding the value of a civilization, a culture, or a religion was the kind of individual it produced, and the amount of good it did to humankind.

This is the law I am trying to put forth, the law adopted by the prophets; it is the law that mankind will have to accept, sooner or later. And even in the issue of monotheism, we shall have to accept the amount of good that is brought about through belief in the One God as the proof that monotheism is a sound belief.

Up till now we have been discussing the profitable in connection with time, through following up history; but we need also to consider the profitable across space. It is not a beneficial thing that gives advantage to some individuals at the expense of the majority, that favors a certain group while it harms another. Biased and skewed views of the law of the more beneficial and more extensive across time will ruin it, and it has been the reason for ruining civilizations, religions, and cultures. It is so because the law does not relate to an individual or a small group – the more extensive is its population the truer it will prove to be.

You see people accept a law even when it is severe if it applies to all, without being prejudiced in favor of some. That is why the Prophet, peace be upon him, says, "Those who were before you encountered failure for they would acquit the notable person if he stole, but punished the humble." (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim) And we may say in the light of this law that the UN Security Council may be on the way to destruction if it persists in granting some of its members the Veto Right. The Qur'an teaches us "when you judge between man and man, you judge with justice" (4:58): for justice to be justice, it must be even-handed justice, applied to all.

Disbelief and polytheism must be understood as inequality among people. Some Muslim scholars did notice that a state ruling with justice would survive, even if it were disbelieving; and a state would perish if it ruled with injustice, even it were a Muslim state.

People get confused about applying the law of doing good: they see it apply, as they assume, to even the burglar seeking to gain what is good for himself; but they are wrong here, as the burglar's purpose is for quite a short term, and he seeks good for himself alone. He certainly does not think of even the long term for himself, let alone thinking of the good of the majority of people. Of course so many people seek good for themselves, but fail to look far into the future, and fail to see how much good they do to others. That is the meaning of our failing to see the value of history.

When the Qur'an compares nations and peoples to individuals, what they have in common is having a life span, but of course with the great difference in the duration of the life span of an individual in comparison with a people or a civilization. Ibn Khaldoun awoke to the fact that while history appeared, to the casual observer, as no more than an aggregate of so many details about nations and rulers; its essence was great insight, an investigation of the causes of events, and a revelation of the genesis of creation.

Let me tell you how I view the importance of history, which the Qur'an accepts as the witness for its truth. Now nations have for some time awakened to the importance of inoculations against smallpox and polio; the WHO is proud to offer a prize for anyone who can detect any case of smallpox outside labs. And even countries low on the curve of knowledge and education have learned this trick. Well, let me say then that if those who did the explosions in the World Trade Center, in the Tokyo tunnels, and, before that in Mecca in 1979, if they had been inoculated well with historical knowledge they would not have done it; the virus for blind destruction would have been killed within their minds. But of course, it must be a thorough and well reasoned knowledge,

showing the transitions from stage to stage, from one phase of human development to the next. Do you see how far historical insight can go? It can do away with mischief and destructiveness, and any pointless spilling of human blood. And this does not only apply to obscure young men – it applies to world-known heads of states. All have been led into spilling human blood by their lacking historical knowledge.

The Qur'an's method in narrating the events about past nations and peoples is to give some details and then comment with generalizations like, "Thus do We explain the Signs in detail; and perchance they may turn to Us;" (7:174) "We have explained in detail in this Qur'an, for the benefit of mankind, every kind of similitude: but man is, in most things, contentious;" (18:54-55) and "Such were the populations We destroyed when they committed iniquities; but We fixed an appointed time for their destruction." (18:59). The Qur'an will not fail to show people's responsibility for what befell them: they failed to link causes and effects.

But people are mostly blind to the consequences of human conduct. We all know the extreme case of the robber who does his robbery, who is reinforced by quick results, and is blind to the catastrophe that usually follows. In the same way, the colonizers saw the quick results of their occupation, and maybe they did later realize the mischief they had done as they had hampered the coming of the era of reform. Foucault divined this fear of knowledge in people's minds, what he called 'the deep fear of the logos.' It is the blind fear of losing the quick advantages. Men would not like to consider the long-term results. The states which enjoy the Veto Right would not like to face the long-term sinister consequences of their holding on to that privilege. Most of the leaders are unaware of the curses that will pour on their names in the future, for all the great havoc that followed on their quick advantages.

When we recite in the Qur'an, "Such is the punishment of your Lord when He punishes communities in the midst of their wrong: grievous, indeed, and severe is His punishment;" 11:102) the normal reaction must be to shudder; it is not right that we pass by such verses feeling nothing. Let us not be less sensitive than the Indian philosopher who insisted on speaking out his mind to the king, and when his disciples warned him against it he said: "I realize the risk, but I cannot imagine letting history put on record that this philosopher was alive at the time of a tyrannical king without speaking to him." I wonder if some of us have the historical sense, by not letting the present conduct continue as that would be a disgrace in the eyes of our future generations.

To Love the Short-term Benefit and to Disregard the Long-tem Benefit

We speak of the ignorant young men who alarm the world with explosions here and there, and of the world leaders who precipitate the world into terrible wars. But we have to turn now to the intellectuals. Do they fulfill what is due on them, by pointing out the right way, or do they still find their satisfaction in fawning on the powerful men? If the latter, then they put the immediate gratification of desires before the long term gratification; when the Lord says in the Qur'an, "Nay, you men! But you love the fleeting life, and leave alone the Hereafter." (75:20-21); and "they love the fleeting life, and put away behind them a Day that will be hard;" (76: 27) in all these and similar situations we must understand "the later outcomes" to include not only the Hereafter, but the consequences in this world, too. We should not let the idea of the unseen so overwhelm us not to let us consider the long-term consequences of deeds, not only in history, but in the Qur'an, too.

I may mention in this connection that while some philosophers and clerics condemned imperialism on ethical account, Malek Bennabi quotes a quite different criticism leveled by some economists, who asserted that the same profits that the colonizers reaped through piracy and plunder could be obtained and much more at much less costs, in a human sense, in deals in which all parties would be winners.

I feel that I keep beating about the bush, since the ideas I am dabbing in are not yet elaborate enough in my hands, and so do not come out smoothly and convincingly. They need to be

developed much further to be of real use to people. I hope that some of the brighter Muslims would think of Moses and Pharaoh, and their story as mentioned time and time again in the Qur'an. But let me pass on to some analysis of the life of Abu Dhar, in the same way as I commented on Bilal.

I like to think of the Prophet's, peace be upon him, saying of Abu Dhar that he lives by himself, dies by himself, and is resurrected by himself. (Reported by al-Hakem, who rated it as 'authentic'; while al-Dhahabi commented that a name in the link of reporters was glossed over.)

It is not right that Abu Dhar should be forgotten in the folds of history. It is significant, too, how a human like this is forgotten; it is worthwhile to consider what might bring him back to recognition. It will be seen then why so many positions appear to be worthless while Abu Dhar's regains its well-deserved honorable place. He learned well the lessons of the Prophet and the lessons of history. But as I said above, we have in the sun a great sign, how we see it daily, all of us, but then we can be badly deluded about it – for how long did men asserted that it was the sun that revolved round the earth, and then all their assertions were shown to be misguided. We have every reason to doubt our knowledge and understanding. And this so important, as all our behavior stems from our understanding, conscious or unconscious.

That we are sure of what we believe is no evidence that it is right. It can be, and very often is, entirely wrong. The proof for what we hold to be true does not lie inside the mind. It is not so about what we hold to be true about the sun and the moon, and it is not so about the Prophet, peace be upon him. Indeed, if what people insist that what is in their minds is true were so, the world would be ruined. This is something we find in the Qur'an, "If the Truth had been in accord with their desires, truly the heavens and the earth, and all beings therein would have been in confusion." (23:71) Galileo was right not because he believed he was so, but because there was evidence out there that what he claimed was true.

That is why I say that what all men hold to be true is not true, and what the prophets asserted to be true is really so. In the same way as we long insisted that what is in our minds about the sun and moon was true was disproved, so I insist that what we hold to be true about the prophets and the books they taught is not true. Let us just accept that neither what I claim to be true is so just because I am so sure it is, nor is what the other claims to be true is so just because he is so sure it is so. It is about this that the Qur'an says, "certain it is that either we or you are on right guidance or in manifest error." (34:24) The proof for truth is quite something else: it is in the consequences of what we claim to be true, when we act upon it.

This shift in the accepted evidence from what is in the mind to the reality outside the mind is a most significant one. This is the kind of change that we mean when we say that by changing what is in our minds we may be sure that God will change our condition. This shift does not prove that we can change the law, but that the law is proved once again to hold. The Qur'an says about that "no change will you find in Allah's way of dealings; no turning off will you find in Allah's way of dealings." (35:43). Once we understand the law, we can put it to use, and the evidence that we understand rightly is that what we claimed to be true is working. We also should add that no understanding is final. You may wish to see what the Qur'an says about all this. Here is an example. "Until when We seize in punishment those of them who received the good things of this world, behold, they will groan in supplication! It will be said: 'Do not groan in supplication this day: for you shall certainly not be helped by Us. My Signs used to be rehearsed to you, but you used to turn back on your heels – in arrogance: talking nonsense about the Qur'an, like one telling fables by night.' Do they not ponder over the Word of Allah, or has anything new come to them that did not come to their fathers of old? Or do they not recognize their Messenger, that they deny him? Or do they say, 'he is one possessed'? Nay, he has brought them to the Truth, but most of them hate the truth. If the Truth had been in accord with their desires, truly the heavens and the earth, and all beings therein would have been in confusion and corruption! Nay, We have sent them their admonition, but they turn away from their admonition." (23:64-71)

Do not you see that the Muslims want to be devout and pious, but would not accept to ponder on such directives about the way out at the time of violent uproar and general chaos, even from their Prophet? That they are so sure they are good Muslims is no proof that they follow in his steps. Muslims still take what their forefathers accepted to be true to be nearer the truth than what the Prophet taught. And it does not avail Muslims to attribute their disasters to the West or any other party. History has the means to punish us for our failings; that is the right kind of teacher; the teacher that can put people right. And that is why the Qur'an keeps reiterating the injunction to look well at history; as for instance in 89:6-14. This is the criterion for behavior, how it is judged to be true by history. But of course history's reminding can be quite severe and stern. It reminds with casualties and losses and humiliation. All that to awaken people, and to remind them that what they hold as sacred can very well be the opposite. All superstitions and delusions will be shaken with the lashes of disaster that they engender. And no matter how vehemently we cite verses of the Qur'an, traditions of the Prophet, or sayings of the greatest scholars that what we do is the right thing to do, history may have a different verdict, and will show its verdict relentlessly in the way it deals with us. It will show that delusions are delusions. Its power is indeed invincible. But have the lashes inflicted on us been enough for us to awake? "But how terrible was My penalty and My warning!" (54:16) Do we yet find evidence enough in what the prophets have taught?

Self-analysis

We need to be flexible in our understanding and in what we think to be true. History teaches us to review and revise, and to do that time and again. Have we not been shown to be wrong about the most glaring of facts? Have we not been asserting all along that it is impossible to be wrong about something, like the sun, and then shown to be so wrong? Is there no reason enough to reconsider what we hold to be right? Having failed in attaining what we wish to attain must teach us, must force us to think again, and to put into our consideration that there is something wrong about our conception of things. We have so long insisted that Adam's son was wrong, and his aggressive brother was right; we took Adam's son to be crazy or something like that; but we were wrong. Can we then change our attitude? Can we reverse our attitudes? Generally and about this issue of spilling blood?

But our values and ideas, taken without examination, still hold fast; and we still attribute causes to events without any reasonable examination or testing. Should I desist and say that all my going round the story of Adam's son is to no avail, is all in vain, is a cry in a valley?

But no, I have no reason to accept Nietzsche's claim that history is no more than a series of lies, and a curse after a curse. I have no reason to accept the Muslims' assertion that the world is getting more violent, and it is going to be more violent. Am I the odd man, the discordant tune? How long shall I have to repeat and fish for my evidence here and there until the message finally gets home, until something happens in the minds of people? Is there something to remove those plugs from ears?

The way Muslims perceive things makes them say: "What rubbish is this man dishing out while violence has been there in Islam, and for the support and promulgation of Islam? Where can you hide the great battles of the Prophet, Badr, Uhud, and all the great battles of Islam, the battles that raised the word of God?" I do realize the difficulty, especially when both God-fearing Muslims and secularists find violence to be the right solution. It is a universal shift that is needed, and not a minor thing.

One point about this difficulty is that it is just a permanent and fixed idea in the minds of Muslims of any group. Yes, it is proving to be quite obstinate to shake, but with enough patience it will begin to change. I do realize that the Qur'an says about a certain community at a certain juncture that, "Those who reject Our Signs and the Meeting in the Hereafter – vain are their deeds: can they expect to be rewarded except as they wrought?" (7:147) But the Prophet, peace be upon

him, would not give up, and he did see light at the end. It happens the world is primed for accepting this kind of idea. We really need to know the history of humankind, as the Qur'an says, "Travel through the earth and see how Allah originated creation." (29:20) Was not there a time when humans ate human flesh? When we say that creation is not a one-time act, that it is a process, and that there is always something more – well what is it that we consider more, or better, in the life of mankind? And more challenging to philosophers is the question about the criterion that lets us tell the false and the true. It is indeed the normal thing for a human to keep questioning his/her way, and others', of judging something to be right or wrong. The Qur'an leaves no doubt that what is true is true and what is false is false, that things must be tackled and sorted out, "The blind and the seeing are not alike; nor the depths of darkness and the light; nor are the chilly shade and genial heat of the sun;" (35:19-21), and "Nor can Goodness and Evil be equal." (41:34)

To deny such basic facts would render any discussion pointless and in vain, although we must realize at the same time that there are always some borderline details that may not be decided upon, no matter how hard you search. The world goes by the law of the more beneficial, what does more good to more people for a longer time. Not to realize that there is some good to help people attain, and some harm to help them avert, would make life nonsense; and people who do not realize that may admit of no responsibility, and may turn to destruction: just a blind chaotic eruption. That is why history is so vital; and of course when you understand the past, your mind will see some steps ahead. We need to believe in development and progress, and when a human intervenes, with a good base of knowledge, he/she can accelerate change, and can eliminate the mistakes of the past.

It is possible to view human history as one of treachery, falsehood, meanness and villainy; but it is equally possible to see in it the nobility, truthfulness, loyalty and virtue. One good example of good effort is the UNESCO's project of writing human history, started in 1950, and concluded in 1969; and then it was realized that they needed to rewrite history twenty years after the first project, and they actually started doing that, their first volume being published in 1994. That is good news, for as long as humans survive, their history must be written and rewritten. When will Muslims have an active role in such projects? Will they even read what others publish? How many copies will be sold of a book of this quality? How many Muslims will read it? It does not help us be just proud of Ibn Khaldoun.

Indeed to realize this state of being well-guided, or right minded '*rashad*, in Qur'anic terminology' must be quite hard; otherwise how can we understand there not appearing any 'upright' ruler after the four Upright Caliphs? But is it not worth our while to look into that, how we lost the state of right-mindedness, and how we can regain it? According to the Qur'an (7:147), people lose this faculty when they do not turn their attention to the signs around them, those who turn a blind eye to the facts around them. At the same time, to see right from wrong is within human ability, "Truth stands out clear from Error," as the Qur'an says. (2:256) Moses had this crave for acquiring right-mindedness, and he accepted the condition of the wise man to learn more right-mindedness, "May I follow you, on the footing that you teach me something of the Truth which you have been taught?" he asked, as the Qur'an reports. (18:66) We speak now of rationalizing our use of water or electricity, but what about our direction in life?

The Qur'an stipulates a state of maturity for running one's own finance. "If you then find sound judgment in them, release their property to them;" (4:6) so what about this state of maturity in education, in social change? Unless we rise to a certain threshold of maturity we have no right to complain that the world is just not coming under control. As you see, I move about and find myself discussing the same things. Here I find that somehow we come to the issue of the two readings of the Qur'an, and men's responsibility to choose their way and to have control of changing their conditions.

I keep raising a lot of questions, but can I give some answers? It is thrilling to see children, at a certain stage of their development, raise questions about all sorts of things; quite an endless battery of questions, but that stage seems to come to an end after about two years. Maybe they

discover that those around them do not have the answers; and they go on accepting the world as incomprehensible. But it is fascinating, nonetheless, to observe this potential for a creative approach to life and the world, and this happens again with every new child. It is also interesting because the children reproduce in their questions the whole history of humankind.

Some of children's questions are quite intriguing, but more intriguing is the question about the way to distinguish wrong from right. But we need to discuss this question often enough to make it much easier. Was it not impossible one day to think of domesticating animals? And then we came to a time when we no longer used them as our means of transport. Things are open to humans, and it is time that we worked on telling what is right and what is wrong. Do not you see how in many parts of the world they have gone beyond transferring rule through violent means, and even through inheritance? For other parts of the world, mainly in Muslim states, it is unthinkable. So human beings can develop and go ahead. But what they have achieved so far is modest.

Does all this help, even a little bit? I am trying to indicate that we are not blocked from living a mature life.

One important question is what it is that prevents men from attaining this stage of good guidance and maturity. According to the Qur'an the major hurdle is arrogance, which prevents people from being wakeful to the signs around them, "Those who behave arrogantly on the earth in defiance of right – I will turn away from My Signs; Even if they see all the Signs, they will not believe in them; and if they see the way of right conduct, they will not adopt it as the Way; but if they see the way of error, that is the Way they will adopt. For they have rejected Our Signs, and failed to take warning from them." (7:146). When a human can turn his head from the signs before him, he is really arrogant. Have they not learnt in many parts of the world about a rational way of transferring rule? And they learnt it from observing the facts of life, not from revelation from heaven. Again you see how much of what we attribute to God is really the responsibility of humans. Somehow Muslims find it more convenient to discuss that which is in heaven, but I like to come down to earth.

Changing a Government and Changing Ideas

So you see I do not crave, as most Muslims do, to see a change in governments. Nor does it thrill me to see a change there, unless it is the end result of changes in our mindset. I see things in the light of the verse, "Let there be no compulsion in religion; Truth stands out clear from error." (2:256) It is through persuasion that a government must change and not through violence and compulsion.

I am not aware of anyone having viewed things from this vantage-point. But can it become a common approach? Will a group declare that it will not attempt to cause change to happen without any resort to violence? Do some study history and learn from its lessons? Is it not enough that we have tried and tried for fourteen centuries, and have always failed to change things to the better through resorting to violent means? Are we not primed yet for a more mature way? Why have others succeeded in having sense while we have not?

It is charming, however, to realize that God's laws have no favorites, and no nation is exempt from the law of God. All human beings must answer to the verse, "You are but men." (5:18) But those who rise above others would not have the laws that apply to others apply to them. About such people the Lord says, as we see in the Qur'an, "Those who behave arrogantly on the earth in defiance of right – I will turn away from My Signs; Even if they see all the Signs." (7:146) Have I at least got the message over, at least to some individuals? To win over only some would raise my morale.

The problem with people is that they find the other barbaric to commit violence, an unacceptable crime; but their own violence seems justified. Do not do it, man! Do not place

yourself as above God's laws! Nor try to deny how your passions and desires control you. Remember how prone you are to sin or stumble or err! Neither I nor you are immune to trespassing.

We need to learn from the physician who deals with his patient as in need of help, not in need of elimination. This is something we need to apply to human failings, without contempt, without slandering or backbiting. With the required knowledge at your disposal you do not need to compel the other or to force his hand. You can give him content, and make him feel you have mercy for him, tolerance and equanimity. People are not opposed to knowledge; it is only the style that alienates them.

I do realize that I have more words of complaint than words of solution. I know that I am not equipped to provide convincing examples. And there are enough examples in life. It is only my ignorance that I can plead as the cause of my wordiness and thin writing. I can only turn to the good reader to bear with me, and look through all this, in case he can find some insights here and there.

I sometimes read that physicists enter the electrons into accelerators that help them study certain facts about the atom. That is fascinating. But it is painful that people do not study the method of prophets which helps in accelerating human progress and in getting over human problems. It seems that believers feel abashed, and hold back whatever occurs to them about the way of prophets.

CHAPTER FIVE

HUMANKIND AND HISTORY

Foucault and History as Reference

We said something above about Foucault. He concluded that although psychoanalysts have succeeded in unraveling some types of madness, they have not got to the extreme madness, a form of seeking others' good that falls outside the domain of rationality or science, in Foucault's system. This form of altruism is in direct clash with Western culture; and, as those who know Foucault well declare, he himself has opted to affiliate with the small group who uphold altruism.

Nietzsche had announced the death of God, and Foucault announced a few decades later the death of man. Of course, what the former is asserting is that the traditional reference of knowledge had died, and so the latter is announcing that not only the conventional reference of knowledge has died, but even a human as the reference has. But neither Nietzsche nor Foucault has indicated the great authority embodied in history, a reference that a human can always review and draw on. It is the dialectic that relates man to culture. It is the place where man can ascertain how culture used to develop spontaneously, and then it was a human's responsibility to intervene and direct culture's development. And it was through his earthly means that man was granted this ability.

It is such a striking discovery, this chance for a human to play a major part in shaping his own character, by having control over the contents of his mind. A human being is no longer a simple creature, since God Himself is awaiting his/her doing his/her part, before God does His part! "Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls." (13:11) The point here is that culture itself is a product of the human being, but it also shapes the human mind. You see how a human can be above anything in this creation, but can also lower than many animals.

The novel thing here is that a few individuals here and there have awakened to the importance of a human's ability to find his/her way and forge ahead. Some believers and some non-believers realize that now, although their number is quite insufficient.

When one's eyes are opened to the potentials of knowledge, he will no longer feel any hostility, none to any individual or conviction. And when an individual gets to that height, he may feel diffident, since he may be ostracized by society, and this is what makes Foucault hesitate and hold back. He would use words like 'pragmatic' 'altruism' or 'ontology' to describe such conditions, but is diffident when he does so; he thinks that those conditions are beyond the reach of knowledge or science, that the persons characterized with this are kind of mad.

Language Is the Problem

It is in a very real sense a problem of language. It is also in a very real sense a problem of seeing, hearing and intellect. When the Qur'an says to the Prophet, "Allah can make any that He wills to hear; but you cannot make those to hear who are buried in graves;" (35:22) do we recall the two readings of the Qur'an? God's bounty has endowed a human with hearing, but how he/she hears and how he/she listens is their responsibility. If men go very far in never heeding, they will not have the last word there – there are the lashes of history, which will at some stage bring them back to their senses.

Language comes first here. You tell someone not to touch something, as it will burn his hand; not to take drugs, as they will have grave consequences for him and his family; not to break a pledge, even if he thinks his treachery will be of advantage in the short run. When you tell people all this, when you tell them that justice will do them much good, but they refuse to heed, then God's law says: "Well, then, receive such torture as those before you suffered!" Language should be good enough for thinking people, but if they fail to learn and if that does not make them see and hear, then, as the Qur'an says, "no change will you find in Allah's way of dealing; no turning off will you find in Allah's way of dealing." (35:43)

Nothing has sense before we look at its consequences, for a human can ascribe whatever meaning to anything; even words like Allah, the Messenger, the Scripture, the Last Day, the disbeliever – they are words, and it is up to us to provide them with what we imagine is right, or claim is right. The evidence for any sense that people claim is the consequences of their claim; consequences have no favorites. We are given the option to learn the consequences without paying dearly for our blindness. But, sooner or later, we shall have to succumb to consequences as the real criterion. Let us again remember the verse, "thus Allah by parables shows forth Truth and Vanity. For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of humankind remains on earth." (13:17). If you learn from the past, you are in your right sense; if you fail to learn from the past, then the future will make of you a lesson for others, as you suffer the consequences of your heedlessness.

So when some philosophers speak of the death of God, or the death of man, it is the contents of their minds about God or about a human that have died. They had attributed to those concepts a certain sanctity, but then discovered that what was in their minds was not sacred, nor absolute; it is the sense in their minds that is bound to die. But the consequences do not belong to a human, nor do they just fail to happen if a human thinks they will not happen. A human often has a most deluded idea about God, as the Qur'an reminds us, "But this thought of yours which you entertained concerning your Lord, has brought you to destruction, and now you have become of those utterly lost!" (41:23), and "another band … moved by wrong suspicions of Allah – suspicions due to Ignorance." (3:154)

A human is a historical being; that is, he/she keeps changing as time passes; he/she acquires more knowledge, and he/she comes to divine the laws that control his/her dealings with the cosmos around him. Whatever a human learns and wants to transmit to others, he/she will have to use language as the medium. But language is not the facts – only symbols that stand for the facts. The real sense lies in the good consequences and the bad consequences; and as long as those consequences are not clear to men's minds, they keep disputing and wrangling.

Now we see that in a very real sense language is not the real problem; and even the historical events have sense to the extent that we understand the consequences of behaviors. If we do, we cease to scream or be aggressive: We would say: "You just show me a solution with a better outcome and I follow you." That is why the Qur'an asserts that once the right thing is there, the false thing will just vanish, "And say: 'Truth has now arrived, and Falsehood perished: for Falsehood is by its nature bound to perish.'" (17:81). And if the world believes, from the tiniest of villages, to the halls of the UN, that falsehood will sway and dominate for long, then they will be disproved; not because I say it, but because the consequences of their ways will show that.

So it turns out that we still live in darkness, that there is so much to discover. I just have a glimpse of a solution for the problem of humankind, something like the discovery that the earth is round. Was that not so hard to accept, and now is admitted by everybody. The same will happen when people understand the problem of humankind.

The problem now is that each society believes itself to be the center of things, that its race is the purest and highest. My proof for that is the Veto Right, a most flagrant example of arrogance and self-centeredness. It is like a very loud cry, "Me the mightiest; me the final truth; if you deny it, remember what happened to Galileo, when he denied that the earth was the center of the universe!"

Of course there were tyrants in history who claimed to have unlimited power. The Qur'an tells us about the arrogant kind who bragged, "I give life and death." (2:258). The real problem in such cases is not in the despot, but in that the others around him envy him; they do not really wish to see his example disappear, but wish they were in his place. We can now see how really little that king was, and even how little Pharaoh was. There is a huge difference between endeavoring to see privileges withdrawn from a particular person or group, and endeavoring to see that privileges are eliminated altogether.

This last is the target that we must act to see realized. The prophets came to rid both the arrogant of his arrogance and the oppressed of his oppression. But that target seems to be a far cry to us. We do not even feel that the downtrodden is laboring under fetters; it is farther from our consciousness to perceive that the tyrant labors under fetters. It is the same game that both parties share, the game of the oppressor and the oppressed. It is a way of life; the alternative being a society of equality and justice. Maybe one short rule stated by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, can help one go one step out of the game of the arrogant and the submissive, his saying, "No obedience is due in contradiction with God's commands."

Muslims and Making Peace

It is evident that in the present trends of the Muslim world it is quite loathsome that one talks of being the first to offer peace. This is extreme madness for them. Can we decide to make peace with other Muslims; to do that we must realize that the making of peace is to be done on earth, and not in heaven; God will not make peace until we have adopted the concepts of peace. We cannot repeat that too often. We need to remember in order to understand how it happens that we are more wary of each other than of our bitterest enemies. And we have shown that we can appeal to our enemies to save us from our brethren. If the two World Wars were examples of wars among the arrogant and haughty, the two Gulf wars were examples of Muslim-Muslim and Arab-Arab wars. That germ is a greater source of risk than America, and than Israel. It is a germ that can distract us, and divert us from our real enemies, exactly as the matador can wave the red cloth to divert the bull from its real enemy.

And, as extreme ignorance reigns, Muslims often do not distinguish between a war (like Badr, Uhud, or Hunain) that is yes violent, but is not unlike the surgeon's effort when he operates and cuts off the infected appendix or any such operation, and the stupid wars that often rage in the modern world, like the Gulf wars.

What I am trying to unearth are certain historical laws that we keep stored away under lock and key; to reveal how we have concepts of the world, created by our imagination, but we view them as the perfect revelations of God and His Prophet. It is up to us to make a mature approach to things; it is our responsibility to make it detestable to follow the way of misguidance. But for that to happen we need a lot of guides who are able to show the way; we need some young men and young women who will dedicate themselves to revealing this, who will cure the hearts of other Muslims. But where does one find this science? How does one point out the way? We need both to find the way, and to master the language that will appeal to most people. The talented artist counts a lot in that respect. For it happens that the thinker is not always the poet, and the poet is not always the thinker.

One of the first tasks would be to determine at what time Muslims started to follow the way of maturity and good guidance, and at what time they started to lose that.

Let us first remember the soul of a human, how a human was endowed with the ability to follow either the way of virtue or vice. The Qur'an says about that, "By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it, and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right – truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it." (91:7-10).

We may not assert the existence of the drive to virtue and good guidance alone in the human spirit; nor the drive towards vice and misguidance. To admit one side and deny the other would be a heresy about God, and would blur the distinction between belief and disbelief, virtue and vice, Pharaoh and Moses, good deeds and bad deeds.

That both sides are there within the human character is the creation of God; but to choose either way is the responsibility of a human; it is also the responsibility of the society where the individual is raised. Do you see how often we need to cite the two readings of the Qur'an, and how we seem to come across them at every turn? We need it here when both laymen and scholars inquire: "Is guidance to the right way granted by God, or is it the doing of a human being?"

Let us remember what we have just quoted: "By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it, and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right – truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it." (91:7-10) As you see, the first two verses here refer to the act of God, and the last two to a human's. Let these verses be so commonly used that their sense sinks deep into the hearts of everybody. Let it be as clear as possible that it is we that, consciously or unconsciously, do the purifying or corruption of the spirit.

It is not just a single act in our experience, like the foolhardy adventure of the Gulf wars; nor is it a single act that distinguishes a sane life from a life ruled by the jungle law. But God will never give up; His law is there, for all those who can see, and it is there to punish those who fail to see. And I feel it incumbent on me to keep drawing attention to all the relevant facts, feeling sure that guidance will be distinguished from misguidance.

You may test where Muslims stand by asking any random Muslim who among fighters is performing *jihad*, and who fights in the way the *khawarij* fought; whose fighting is legal, and whose is not; and what the conditions of warranted fighting are. Do Muslims recall the Prophet's, peace be upon him, saying: "Whoever fights under a blind banner, then he may die the same way as the pre-Islam Arabs died in their fighting." (Reported by Muslim).

Is it not time we put this serious issue under investigation? Is it not time we sorted out when killing is a crime, and when the human soul is sacred, and under what conditions it would be legal to slay a human? Did not the Messenger, peace be upon him, warn us during his Farewell Pilgrimage, against reverting into disbelief by killing each other?

The many layers of malice and anger against each other disable our minds from thinking with some vividness. I feel my kind of work to be like the archeologist's, since I have to remove so much earth that buries these subjects. Some take such attempts to resurrect these topics as trying the impossible, while others wait for the enlightenment to descend from beyond the clouds to save us. Both parties do not try to act on the model of the prophets.

My endeavor is to see the verse, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2:256) work in our life; for when it does, love will take the place of ill-will and hatred. But we have gone a long time in the way of compulsion, in religion and politics, that we find it so hard to imagine an alternative to this way. It is unthinkable to the Muslim mind to respond to blind aggression but with blind aggression. Sane and mature responses seem mad, and, ironically, we imagine that we can attain a life of peace and uprightness through violent means. It is so because people take their own misguidance to be justified, while they take others' misguidance to be unjustified. That is why when the above verse says, in the next clause, "Truth stands out clear from Error" we do not find that to be true in our life, for good guidance has not come clear from misguidance. Such things we need to stop a long time and reflect on, to see where every one of us stands in connection to them.

When I review the method I am advocating to some listeners, I tell them that I have a way in which we may all be winners; none will have to lose his/her position or wealth or land, and none will have to risk his/her life or any other's life; I remind them that there is no problem but may not be solved in a peaceful way. But so far I have not succeeded in getting the idea over to my audience. Is it then so hard to comprehend? Or is it that the resistance to good guidance is so deep in our consciousness? This latter seems to be the case.

CHAPTER SIX

LESSONS FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

I am aware that nothing but real events, visible to all those who have eyes to see, will drive home the idea. That is why I present here an example from recent history, as history is a great source of insight, for it provides the precedent. And it is God's will that men understand by moving about having their eyes and ears open to the lessons of what actually took place in the earth. It certainly saves people a lot of suffering, while disregarding history's facts will cost a very high toll.

Now to my example. It shows you how sober and informed thinking is the way to a better life, not the best, but better than what we usually see. As I present this I regret that for many men, the signs before their eyes have no meaning at all, a condition which the Qur'an scolds: "And how many Signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? yet they turn their faces away from them!" (12:105).

I refuse to disregard this experience, as millions of Muslims do. I do not remember to have come across an event like this, anywhere in history. It is so because those who undertook to design and execute it have taken very good care of its foundations and its objectives. They were well aware of the terrible suffering that they received and that was still alive in their memories. What I am writing about is the European Union.

I have every reason to say it was unprecedented. It does not deter me that some Muslims will mock me and say: "What is this! Are you so fascinated by the Europeans?" But I do not work here on the basis of love and hate. For to proceed on the basis of love and hate will not help us see what is good and useful on the one hand, and the bad and useless on the other. It is also more usual for people to accept wholesale or to reject wholesale.

We have a long way to go before we can reward people for the good they do, and just turn a blind eye to their misbehavior. What can you do when the people with the distinguished accomplishments are few and the froth is so thick? You are bound to say to the achiever: "Well done!" But the others' achievement has thrown us in a state of bewilderment and despondency. And history is there to charge us high for our ignorance, as everybody has seen in the Gulf war. But history can be kind, too. It is willing to offer its lessons free of charge. If you just go to history and ask for its lessons, it will be a dedicated teacher, but if you refuse, then it has its other ways of rendering its service.

And even after you have paid dearly for your misconduct, be sure not to pay for it once again. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has warned us against this, "A believer will not be bitten twice from the same hole." (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim) However, we seem to need more than one war, and in the same way, to learn; but learn we must and will. One good thing about the last war is that some people seem to think more and analyze more; and people do not just condemn the politician for it. It is like the violent storm that uproots so many trees, though water will be seeping silently into earth to water new plants.

But the Europeans had paid more for their experience, hundreds of millions in two world wars. There must be a lot of things written about their union, how it was devised as a transaction, with profits and losses calculated carefully. There must be comparisons between this even-handed transaction and the former attempts by men like Napoleon and Hitler who sought, most violently, to unite Europe, reaping nothing but havoc and devastation. This is the way of coercion which the Qur'an warns us against. But they learned to give up the wrong-headed way, and chose a well-

guided way. It is the 'equity' that we find in the Qur'an, "O People of the Book! Come to common terms between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him." (3:64) The Europeans' is the solution in which no one is humiliated, all sides are winners, and no one loses his/her fortune or position; their wealth will rise collectively. Their status, inside and outside, will rise.

Is it not an event that we witness in this world, and before our eyes? So it is for us now to have eyes and ears, and the Qur'an keeps reminding us that eyes should exercise their vision, and ears should exercise their hearing. But do not be desperate if you find Muslims incapable at the moment of hearing and seeing, for this is not a permanent condition. We must be part of the solution, by helping them see and hear, and not part of the problem. And there is no effort done in the right direction but will help us get there.

Are you willing to bear with me? Remember that the target is building a new world! It only needs that we heed with open ears, and look with open eyes. Remember, too, that many have undergone a lot of laborious efforts to get us where we are; and so, let us accept the weariness that it takes us push the carriage along the road. We can imagine an objective like that of Jalal al-Deen al-Rumi's, who aspired, with his *Mathnawi*, to transform the whole world. He definitely did his share, and his work still bears its fruit. So did Iqbal have a tremendous impact on the world, and will have more. Such precedents help me go ahead, despite all my incapacity.

What I am trying to tell the world is that there is a new dawn; the West is ready for this dawn, the dawn of equity, after they had paid dearly for all the folly of the past. And I am trying to get to the depth of the Muslim soul – among Muslims, it was the mystic sufis who penetrated there, and tried not to stop at the signs and outer appearance. They did their best to probe to the motives and the nooks and crevices of the soul and the contents of the minds. It is the mercy of God that He wants us to learn from past experiences, so that we do not undergo pain twice for the same experience. There are pains that can be spared; so why have unnecessary pain? Psychologists remind us that we bear many burdens that we do not need to bear, that if we succeeded in unburdening ourselves of those burdens we would be in better shape to face new problems. Indeed, the prophets came to remove many of our fetters and burdens. The idea is that with less burdens we can tackle life's problems more effectively. But what prevents people from choosing this less costly way?

A Human Between Purity and Murkiness

A human can come to a state when he/she no longer can benefit from events that happen before his/her very eyes. This is a human, who can rise to have everything bend to his/her will, and can fall to a point when he/she is less worthy than the humblest of animals.

So do we have the means to have a human opt for the better way? Can we purge spirits that have been tarnished? It is basically the prophets' duty, but we have to take it up, and do not say who am I to do it? There has been Bilal to teach you not to underrate yourself.

Do not say that it must come from God, for God has willed that we start before His guidance comes. There are precedents enough, and examples enough, and the way of the prophets is with us. The world, too, is primed for it, and millions of unsullied spirits are ushered into the world all the time. But we need to present things with so much vividness that no sane person affords to ignore them.

Hence my example about the European Union. For here we have a union that was brought about without any party patronizing or rising above others; it was done on a footing of equality. It is not a stain on it that people have sought material benefit, for the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Much good will good money do for a good man." (Reported by Ahmad, and by al-Bukhari in his *al-Adab al-Mufrad*). It is a big problem, however, if money or status is used to subdue and intimidate others. All the prophets, from Noah until Muhammad, would not accept any charges for

their service (as the Qur'an tells us in for example 26:109; 52:40). It must be crystal clear to people that you, the reformer, do not expect any material gain for your advice. On the other hand, the Gulf War was for nothing but material gain. Well, let those who wage such wars not do it in the name of the prophets, for the prophets were not so base. You see what happens to a people who have the wealth but not the knowledge – their money goes down the gutter. So please, reformers, do not try to gain money through your guidance; let the other feel that you are more likely to help with your money than to covet his/her money. That is what one learns from the Qur'an.

I do realize how tremendous the challenge is, but I hope to put right, with all those who accept to take part in the effort, all that has been corrupted. And every time the endeavor will have to start with changing the attitudes and concepts, particularly pride and aggression. This much we learn from the Qur'an. It is something like rediscovering agriculture, for what happens now is something like cutting off the trees, and we need to plant them. It is hard, but feasible.

Let me say here that my job is breeding bees for their honey. And I well remember how, not a very long time ago, the way to collecting honey used to be by killing the bees. It is not a human who taught the bees to produce honey; and then a human came and killed the bees for the honey. But man learned that he does not need to kill the bees, for he can get the honey without killing. Is not this change admirable? But when can we deal with a human in the same way; when can we get a human's honey without having to kill him/her? Did not humankind take control of electricity, not an easy task, and subdued it for serving his purposes?

If the reader does not get the message here, then it must be my fault. I do have a glimpse of the fascinating other world, but maybe I have not succeeded in bringing it to the notice of the reader.

I do see how greatly honored by God a human is! Can you imagine more honoring than enabling a human to have a say in determining the shape of things in the world? The whole world has been put at the service of man. By studying the past, a human is endowed with unlimited potentials and abilities. This much I have learned from history. Those who think that the world has been created for no purpose are not being fair to God; that is what we learn from the Qur'an, "Men who … contemplate the wonders of creation in the heavens and the earth, with the thought: 'Our Lord! You have created all this not for nothing.'" (3:191) And it is our duty to remove the scales from people's eyes. That is the kind of change of souls that is our duty, and it is feasible. Remember that, according to the Qur'an, despair is coupled with disbelief. It is disbelief to sit back and desist from putting in your effort. Disbelief is the creed of the inert and desperate. O man! You are anxious, but you have a history, and you are a very distinguished being, and you have a future. And your God is Merciful and Compassionate. You just turn on the light, and you will see how the darkness will vanish. Learn the laws of the world and you have control over it.

What got into you that you think of destruction and malice? You have been placed in the earth to develop it, not to destroy it. Observe a sick person before treatment and after treatment! See what happens after the sick person has taken the right medicine. You see his face, how bright and lively. That is your task in the sphere of knowledge, to bring the smile back to people's faces. People will look back then and wonder how they lived so long without the light of knowledge. It is like magic, that change.

A human does lose his/her way when he/she rushes things, and tries to reap the fruit before it is ripe. Of course that is not the same thing as seeking the easier and less costly way; it is our duty in fact to save time and effort.

The starting point will be in the domain of a human's relation with other humans. It is so since many people think that with compulsion they can extract more good from a human, and that is great folly. Indeed, to think that with compulsion one can extract more of a human than with persuasion is the worst form of arrogance; it reflects thinking the worst both about God and about humankind. It is really a great waste, since one puts in a lot of time and effort, but reaps very little. Nor does it produce happiness for any party.

So can we observe the European Union without arrogance, since we are urged by the Qur'an to move about in the earth and be alert to God's signs, "And how many Signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? yet they turn their faces away from them!" (12:105) Is it not a sign from God that these people have designed and executed their union without compulsion? An unprecedented event in human history!

And the European Union did not descend from heaven. So must we not learn what happened to the Europeans that they were ready for this huge stride? Does not their feat follow laws of human behavior? It is definitely not what we are used to, not through conspiracy or secret ways; nor is it on the basis of Germany above all or France above all. It happened because something got into their minds, that the old ways would not lead to union, nor would any claims of greatness; they realized that it must be 'all for all'.

They achieved it by accepting the supreme principle of faith, that we do not take others for gods, nor claim to be gods; that no one on earth has the right to assume a divine position. It is really an admirable option, the best option. It signifies not only that they no longer needed Napoleon or Hitler; it signifies that the culture that produced Napoleon and Hitler is something of the past.

I think we now begin to believe that we do not need one person like Napoleon or Hitler, maybe unconsciously, but the change is coming over us. We begin to rid ourselves of the culture of compulsion, but the change must go further. When we do change we shall be in communion with God, and get to mature thinking.

And when you succeed in ridding yourself of compulsion, it must be in both senses, in the sense of not compelling others to accept what you take to be true; and in the sense of not succumbing to anybody's attempt to compel you; since you are nobody's god, nor is any one but God your god, "You are not warder over them," as the Qur'an tells us (88:22). Unless you give up compelling or being compelled, you have not abandoned the way of compulsion. And the abandoning of compulsion, in both senses, does not call for a state or an army. This is what Bilal achieved; and if some do not appreciate his achievement, it is because they do not appreciate what it means to opt for good sense. Abraham told his people, as the Qur'an reports, "How should I fear the beings you associate with Allah, when you do not fear to give partners to Allah without any warrant being given to you? Which of us two parties has more right to security? Tell me if you know. It is those who believe and do not confuse their beliefs with wrong – that are truly in security, for they are on right guidance." (6:81-82) He definitely has abandoned the domain of compulsion, in both senses. Compulsion is an idol that you need to give up for guidance to be admitted into your heart, and for the feeling of peace to settle in the heart.

When one of the Prophet's companions was tormented to give up faith, the Prophet told him to agree with his tormentors with words, since his enemies had no control over his heart; they cannot compel his heart, and it is there where belief settles.

So can we say now that compulsion cannot be the way to uprightness? Do we need more experiences and suffering after fourteen centuries?

Utterances and Concepts

We may try to twist words this way and this way, but God's law will not change at all; we may give a new name to the same old concepts, but misguidance will not be guidance for the sake of Muslims. Nor will the Europeans' good sense be folly to please us.

Al-Ghazali did think, a thousand years before Saussure, Serle, Chomsky, Heidegger and Nietzsche, along this line, when he said, "Anyone who seeks to draw sense from words will be lost and will end into perdition; he will be like one who seeks to go West, while moving towards the East; but to comprehend concepts first, and then seek the right words for them – that is good guidance."

Words can indicate the required sense, and can indicate its opposite; anyone who thinks that words contain the sense that is required will be far from truth. It may help to consider how skills like swimming are not to be obtained from any writing, no matter how eloquent. So now it maybe easier to consider how the Muslims and other monotheistic religionists go through a time when they do not benefit from what is in their revealed books.

To give the written words their significance, God commands us to move about and observe with open minds what is in the earth.

I say this with reference to the European Union, which was created on the basis of the calculation of profits and losses; statistics and calculations were absolutely the basis for establishing it.

You may wish to see the other side, too. So think of the Soviet Union. It broke up when it failed to approach its problems soberly. It happens that people come to a point when they no longer benefit by their eyes, ears, or minds, as the Qur'an says, (6:7; and 15:13-15). The Soviet Union believed in compulsion and collapsed, in the same way that Muslims at a certain stage believed in compulsion and collapsed.

Hatred took the place of love and confidence, and the Soviet Union no longer cared even for life or wealth; they no longer calculated the profits and losses. This especially happens to nations that have not been in the habit of taking part in taking decisions. And when people are dominated by hatred their faculty of analyzing things comes to a standstill. Of course, there were some wise people who tried to speak sense, but it was not possible to regain the confidence, and history decided that its verdict was disintegration.

I like to use the principle of 'two readings of the Qur'an' in discussing the people of Jonah (*Yunus* in Arabic). And when I cite the Qur'an, I do that not because it is the Qur'an, but because it expresses what we need to express on the basis of logic and reasoning; or, in modern terms, it discusses things in historical and not metaphysical terms. Let me add, too, that the Qur'an uses the word 'hereafter' in the sense of the Last Day, but also in connection with a later stage in this earthly life; as it says of a certain people, "For them there is nothing but disgrace in this world, and in the world to come, an exceeding torment;" (2: 114) and of another group, "We might give them a taste of a Penalty of humiliation in this Life; but the Penalty of the Hereafter will be more humiliating still." (41:16-18) By disregarding the rewards and retribution in this world, as handled by the Qur'an, we waste a very major point in it. On the other hand, reading the Qur'an with reference to this world, revives it and revitalizes it.

And if you wonder why I keep referring to the Qur'an, then remember that while my words have little effect, and on a small number of people, the Qur'an is the great book of Muslims. They will not rise without the Qur'an, and will only rise by the Qur'an. But the great thing to do is to make Muslims interpret the Qur'an with reference to the consequences of behaviors. As long as the Qur'an is used to refer to the Last Day alone, then it is not referred to to solve the problems of this world. I admire Ibn Taymiah when he said to the philosophers he argued with that he did not quote the Qur'an to silence them, but for the sense and logic in its words. So it is not enough that we assert that the Qur'an is full of miracles; for it is the right of those who we encounter to say do not quote the Qur'an. To them also the Qur'an is not related to the cause-effect life in this world. As my concern is what befalls us in this world, like the two Gulf wars, I use the Qur'an as pertaining to this life.

It was Muhammad Arkoun who asserted that Muslims needed a new theology, an idea that he repeats often in his books. He felt somehow, though it remained vague to him, that Muslims needed to understand the Oneness of God in a new light, that is, to learn to read the Qur'an the two readings. And yet, as I quoted him above, he maintains in another place that according to the Qur'an history is not made by people, but by God. It is such idea that prevents the two readings of the Qur'an to be commonly employed.

Do some people feel reactant at the mention of Ibn Taymiah or Arkoun? Well, their names change nothing of the facts. A fruitful idea is good, apart from the person who utters it.

Now let us go the Qur'an about the people of Jonah: " If you were in doubt as to what We have revealed to you, then ask those who have been reading the Book before you: the Truth has indeed come to you from your Lord: so be in no wise of those in doubt. Nor be of those who reject the signs of Allah, or you shall be of those who perish, those against whom the word of thy Lord has been verified would not believe – even if every Sign was brought to them – until they see for themselves the penalty grievous. Why was there not a single township (among those We warned), which believed – so its faith should have profited it – except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the penalty of ignominy in the life of the present, and permitted them to enjoy (their life) for a while. If it had been your Lord's will, they would all have believed – all who are on earth! Will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe! No soul can believe, except by the will of Allah, and He will place doubt (or obscurity) on those who will not understand. Say: 'Behold all that is in the heavens and on earth'; but neither Signs nor Warners profit those who believe not. Do they then expect (any thing) but (what happened in) the days of the men who passed away before them? Say: 'Wait you then: for I, too, will wait with you.' In the end We deliver Our apostles and those who believe: Thus is it fitting on Our part that We should deliver those who believe!" (10:94-103).

I take up such stories and give them their due importance since I would not accept the nihilism of modern philosophers, including Derrida, for they take the world to be an absurdity; and even Skinner, who I admire and from whom I benefited a lot, takes the same position. He does not even deny that a human's movement is like that of a missile. He does realize that man is the product of his material milieu, but seems not to notice that that milieu is never stationary. Nor does he notice that some individuals just would not be missiles. Indeed, Skinner himself worked hard to change attitudes and concepts, even under the oxygen tent near the end of his life – he did not give up because life had a purpose, and he was not a missile. He was once asked about the most remarkable appreciation he met with, and he said it was from a circus trainer, who told him that they adopted his method with animals – they no longer punished animals to control their behavior, but rather rewarded them only for their right behavior, the famous positive reinforcement of Skinner. And it worked better than punishments.

It was heartening to see that teaching can work better with rewards for positive behaviors. And I would say to Skinner, "It is not important what I feel or you feel about things. The world goes along its track, caring nothing for our feelings. But if your behavior or mine has positive results, then it will stay, and occupy its place in existence." It is such a glaring fact, that those who deny it will only have to pay dearly for their denial. So, there is a reference other than you or me, Skinner.

Roger Garodi did better in the matter of the meaning of things. All his effort was directed at confirming the teleology of the world, that things do not just happen haphazardly.

I say all this because the first verse in the story of Jonah's people reads, " If you were in doubt as to what We have revealed to you, then ask those who have been reading the Book before you; " (10:94) which permits doubt, and even urges one to have doubt; for this is the remedy against nihilism. The panacea against nihilism is to look around, and to see and hear what those before us have said. And even if you say I will go to the Qur'an, you will find it will refer you back to the earth and its events, and to those who have studied the events on the earth.

But you need to believe that things are moving, and moving upwards. Things started with animals, and then rose to a human, and a human was given a share in shaping his/her future, and to save time by accelerating creation. This is our panacea against nihilism and absurdity. And it is very healthy after that to be skeptical, very skeptical, which may lead us to sort out what is right and mature behavior, and what is misguided and erroneous behavior. And we cannot afford to waste time. Why should we ignore all this and go doggedly wasting our fortune and life, just clinging to old trodden ways. God has not left men without guidance.

The End of the Age of Heroes

Can the Gulf war be good enough for us to realize that the age of heroics is over, the age of imposing solutions from above? Will we put an end to our young men's offering themselves as prey to the gods of violence and compulsion, while our adults keep mum about it! Do we not have a better alternative? Why do not we take them by hand to a more fruitful way? The way of uprightness is waiting for us, to learn and to impart to the poor crowds. I do realize that we have noble purposes, but the means to them are quite beyond our comprehension. We want to see Palestine liberated, we want to see the Arabs united, and we want to bring back some confidence among Muslims. I do not dispute all that. But we definitely are miserably unable to find the right means to our targets.

We are in this world, are we not? And we need to understand why the Europeans can go ahead with their unity, while we cannot. We need to understand, and we can understand. Let it be clear to everyone that we are not doubting anybody's intentions, but we somehow have not learned the calculation of profits and losses. Is there any doubt that Arabs will profit a lot if they unite? And unite without anybody's losing anything!

We have the example of the European Union, people who chose the right way and succeeded, and we have the example of the Soviet Union, people who chose the wrong way of compulsion and failed. It will be an excellent thing if we deal with the verses of the Qur'an as we deal with other texts, as for example when we read, "Those against whom the Word of your Lord has been verified would not believe – even if every Sign was brought to them, until they see for themselves the Penalty grievous." (10:96-97) It would do us much good to think of the divine Writ in terms of conscious analysis, quantitatively and qualitatively, or maybe with reference to dollars. It must come to be generally perceived that faith pays in very real terms. There is the unveiling of the facts of the way of mature thinking, and there is the boldness to adopt it and act by its dictates, as it takes temerity to follow this little-trodden road. Is it not hard to call on people to follow the example of the European Union, when the Europeans have long been our traditional enemies?

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WAY OF GOOD SENSE

Can Civilizations Challenge Perdition?

Arnold Toynbee, at the end of his *Study of History*, took up the question of whether a civilization could challenge demise. He only hoped that the Christian Civilization could do, although he did not seem optimistic enough.

Toynbee did excellent work by taking up Ibn Khaldoun's cycle of the lifespan of a state, and developed it to be a cycle of the lifespan of civilizations. One thing that Toynbee did not notice was the cycle of prophethood. It is a cycle that does not confine itself to any particular nation or race or civilization. It is something like 'the cycle of man's effort,' from a verse in the Qur'an, "O you man! Verily you are ever toiling on toward your Lord – painfully toiling – but you shall meet Him." (84:6). It was a process that started from the day the Lord said, "I will create a vicegerent on earth;" (2:30); and it ends in a human's realizing God's foreshadowing, in the same verse "I know what you do not know." (2:30)

This process or cycle of 'human effort' started with Adam (and his two sons were given prominence in the Qur'an), and on to Noah, Abraham, and so on until Muhammad. It was a new way of a human's endeavors; and in the last link of man's efforts, the prophets' message, a human was commanded to look at history, to discover its laws; for, as the Qur'an warns the human being, if he/she fails to understand, then history has its way of forcing humankind to listen.

There will be a time, and I can see it in the near future, when people will come under the guidance given by the prophets; and those who try to discourage others from the way of God will be effectively stopped; men will come to accept equality with other men, with no attempt to rise above other men, and without the folly of trying to eliminate compulsion through compulsion.

But not yet. Especially in the Muslim world people cannot up till now consider an alternative to compulsion. Indeed, if Muslims wish to see their bodies relieved of the consequences of compulsion, then they need to dismiss it from their hearts. It is a disease in the heart that, as long as it survives there, will not allow good sense to take its place. And when you are really healed of the disease, you will not make exception for yourself. It begins when the Muslim looks into his own heart and tries to free it from the wish to force others.

Does this go against the grain? So many Muslims who have influence inspire in the hearts of their followers that the more spite and ill-will they have, the better Muslims they are. But this is not what Abraham taught; he prayed to God that his heart be free from impurity. How far from this purity of heart we are when we look with derision at the practice of Bilal and his comrades, taking them to be defeated inside when they accepted to be tormented without taking revenge.

Do you see now why I say that the era of the prophets' system has not arrived yet. People cannot imagine repelling mischief but with mischief, with more severe mischief if possible. Do we think of a way of giving each other a peaceful life instead of hurting each other? That is what the Qur'an teaches us, "Nor can Goodness and Evil be equal. Repel Evil with what is better: then will he between whom and you was hatred, becomes as it were your friend and intimate." (41:34). Do we really think of the way of turning somebody's hostility into love? I suspect that many still regard this as a kind of madness, and that shows you how long a way we shall have to walk. Many still consider compulsion as the good sense. And yet, good sense comes without compulsion.

But let us return to Jonah's people. They are the people who, as the Qur'an recounts, learned the lesson at the right time, and so averted punishment. They are one reason for my optimism; for my insistence that God's light will spread and then dominate. It is not just belief in the unseen but rather belief in something that begins to happen before our eyes. History is my witness; even though many ignore it.

One starting point is to realize that somebody's disbelief is not a cause for eliminating him. Nor should we imagine that the Qur'an calls for this. It is confusion like this that led us to wage the two Gulf Wars; for in the eyes of each party, the others were disbelievers. But, at the same time, we have a book like Muhammad Sa'eed Ramadan al-Booti's *Jihad*, about which I said the first time I saw it, "The world will not be the same after the publication of this book as it was before it." It is not a minor thing that a man of the caliber of al-Booti should publish a book asserting that disbelief is no cause for execution. But it does not mean that the complex problem will be solved with one book.

Works like the above unearth facts that people have ignored for such a long time, and they often meet such unusual ideas with hostility and denial for some time. Well, people may receive well or dispute most vehemently, but history will go its way. Not the smallest bit is lost in history; I mean it will have its part in determining people's destiny. It must show people where they stand, and how they fare. For our part, it is our duty to learn to adapt with the minimum losses and cost. We have with us this excellent teacher which not only teaches the harmful and the profitable, but teaches the law to which they refer, the engines behind the movements of history. (the *sunan* in the diction of the Qur'an (as for example in 33:62.)

It is left to us, in the Muslim world, to learn from Jonah's people and from history how to bring to a minimum the amount of suffering that is inflicted on us, in quality and in quantity; not to be so much disgraced, not to be the greatest losers. So let each one of us do his share in bringing this to pass. Let us not pay again and again for the same mistakes. My own ambition is to discover the main law of history. One thing appears true, that the world was not created as a one-time act, nor is it regressing and declining. This is not what the Qur'an teaches us, nor is it what observation tells us. The world has its own laws of guidance, and moves towards guidance, no matter how pessimistic we may be about it. A human can intervene and save time, and can accelerate the progress, to realize the most profitable. By adopting creative ways, a human can prove what God prophesied for him at the time of his creation.

It is a gross short-sightedness to assume that what happens at the moment will go on happening as it is. Jonah's people are a proof that something can happen that did not happen before. It is our duty to learn to have the model of Jonah's people turn into a general law, not to stay as a single phenomenon. It is always a hurdle to people's advance that they take the novelty of an event as a proof that it cannot happen again. That something is not there does not mean that we do not cause it to come into being. And the world very badly needs this law. The world is stiff with pessimism; and this condition stifles the vitality of the spirit, and does away with its natural vigorousness and motivation.

History has indeed saved me. I saw in it God's creation. I saw how people simply did things in the way they saw them happen; I saw all the losing deals, where time and efforts are wasted. But I also saw how history discards the erroneous ways and practices, and how the world is designed in a way to proceed to the less costly and more merciful, and to the less complicated. It is on a principle of great economy that the world is designed. And the realization of all this is not far away from us; its early harbingers are already with us.

But let us hurry in stopping the bleeding, the great wastage in time, materials, and human abilities. Indeed, to the extent we are short of knowledge we are bound to waste time and energy. History, for long ages, used to proceed spontaneously and slowly. But of late, humans began to open their eyes and see that they can steer things and save time. So when we now speak of truth having the upper hand, we are referring to this awakening to the possibility of following the easier

and less complicated methods. So let us not be among those who deny God's signs. But if we insist on our ways, on not seeking a more fruitful and creative method, history just does not care, for it is we who have to pay the price.

See what distinguished Jonah's people from the others; what merited that penalty should be lifted. So do not doubt that men's effort have effect. God chose not to have all men be well-guided and pious. He chose to have them bear the responsibility, to determine their own destiny. It is a trust a human has to bear. He/she has been given the opportunity to distinguish himself from the rest of creation. And that happens when a human adopts the way of good sense, not compulsion; no faith can enter a heart through compulsion, as the Qur'an says, "'Will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe?" (10:99)

Does all this suffice? Is history our reference, for repetitious and monotonous ways, and for creative and new ways? Does the reader distinguish the two readings of the Qur'an?

What a human has been enabled to do is not little, "And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth." (45:13) But man often underrates himself/herself, and does not take count of the trust put in his/her hands. He/she is required to develop the world, with that ability of distinguishing the profitable and the harmful. So will a human remember this and not regress to a more primitive state?

What the angels objected to is still true of humankind; at the time of creating man, the angels objected to God, "Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?" (2:30). Humans still shed blood and wreak havoc on the earth. They still drive other men from their home (45 million emigrants in the world, according to the latest statistics.) Of course there are all these acts of destruction and mischief, but we must deal with the ideas behind them.

The Criterion for Truth and Falsehood

There is a relation between concepts and behaviors. Concepts and ideas may be put right by learning from the outcomes of behaviors. This may not be clear to many people. Believers or non-believers, we need to comprehend the system of the world. Do we not all need to get over this mischief and bloodshed? It is especially painful that some find in this bloodshed a way to coming close to God. But men will not work out the sense of all this unless they believe that there is a difference between one way and another, as the Qur'an says, "Are the blind equal with those who see? Or the depths of darkness equal with Light?" (13:16).

People will have their nervous system to put to use for distinguishing things. But how do we know that one's nervous system is nearer to truth than the other? The answer is that what is truer is what is more profitable and longer lasting. The pyramids of Egypt are an example. How much did they cost? And what good did they do to how many people?

God provides enough examples, like this one: "After this it is you, the same people, who slay among yourselves, and banish a party of you from their homes; assist their enemies against them, in guilt and rancor; and if they come to you as captives, you ransom them, though it was not lawful for you to banish them. Then is it only a part of the Book that you believe in, and do you reject the rest? But what is the reward for those among you who behave like this but disgrace in this life? – and on the Day of Judgment they shall be consigned to the most grievous penalty. For Allah is not unmindful of what you do." (2:85) It is not a new phenomenon that people are slain, or banished from their homes, as the Qur'an tells us: "And the Unbelievers said to their Messengers: 'Be sure we shall drive you out of our land, or you shall return to our religion.' But their Lord inspired this Message to them: 'Verily We shall cause the wrong-doers to perish!'" (14:13) In fact, very early in the Prophet's career, Waraqah bin Nowfal told him, "I wish I were with you when your people expelled you." The Prophet said, "Will they expel me?" And Waraqah replied, "Yes, no one ever came with a thing like what you are calling for but faced his people's hostility." (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

The two most prominent crimes in the Qur'an are slaying and expelling from home. I know that nothing is more serious than associating any god with God, but that is for God to punish. But in this world it is these two crimes that should not be tolerated nor connived at in the Muslim community – and how can it be a Muslim community if it tolerates that?

We need to define succinctly when and who has the right to put to death; when it is legitimate; and when killing is prohibited and against religious commands. We need to be very clear as each person has a big claim to be right; and it is easy to fall in a state of chaos, where a human is not holding on to the firm hold-on.

It is especially when you are strong that you do not likely to consider the legitimacy of bringing harm to others. And we live in the midst of confusion, where right and wrong are mixed up, and doing good and doing harm are mixed up, so that the common person is most bewildered. How can we expect the common people to distinguish right sense from bad sense when the cultural leaders do no distinguish them?

Of course it is when our hearts are free from the wish for spilling blood or rejoicing at the spilling of blood that our hands will be clean. As I understand the Qur'an you may not aggress against a person who does not brandish his weapon, "if they withdraw from you, and instead send you guarantees of peace, then Allah has opened no way for you to war against them." (4:90)

So opt for peace and you are eligible for the Qur'an's protection; yourself, your fortune, your family will be protected; and you are safe in this world and the next.

Can we now define what soul is sacred, as we see it in a verse like, "Those who do not invoke, with Allah, any other god, nor slay such life as Allah has made sacred, except for just cause." (25:68) Well, let us imagine a spectacle in which two persons are fighting; we would be in doubt who is in the right and who is in the wrong; but if you see a person assaulting another, and the other person holds back his hand, will there be any doubt? That is why I call to the position of Adam's son, as mentioned by the Messenger, peace be upon him, when he said, "Be like Adam's son," (An authentic tradition, reported by al-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawood.)

As you see, nobody can force you to deviate from the way of Adam's son; you have only to hold to it, and in this way you show who has good sense. Insist on being in the light, and do not enter the dark tunnel. An aggressor can kill me, but he cannot make a killer of me. That is how we may understand "to hold back their hands (from fight) but establish regular prayers and spend in regular charity;" (4:77); and "Nay, do not obey him: but bow down in adoration, and bring yourself the closer to Allah." (96:19).

This road is the way of light; you do not get involved in spilling blood, feeling uncertain whether your deed was lawful or unlawful. You will be in accord with the tradition, "Break your sword." (an authentic tradition, reported by al-Tirmidhi, and Abu Dawood) Let us also contemplate another tradition, "When two Muslims clash with their swords, both the killer and the killed are destined to enter Hell." Someone asked, "But how is that so, Messenger of God! We understand that the killer must enter Hell; but what about the killed?" He said, "He was intent on killing the other." He was telling what is right for us, was he not? What happens that Muslims forget all about such traditions?

I do not claim to be an erudite scholar of Islam; but I will keep my hand clean. I keep mindful of that statement by Adam's son, as reported in the Qur'an, "If you stretch your hand against me to slay me, it is not for me to stretch my hand against you to slay you: for I do fear Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds." (5:28) I keep to this square foot of the sacredness of the human spirit, and from there I do all my efforts to spread light. Does it strike you how much peace it gives the heart to feel that the other can kill me, but cannot make a killer of me?

And the world is moving in that direction. So, make of your spirit a sacred thing, and hold on to the way of light. Do not let go for one second, for it is the way of good sense. The problem of course is that truth does not occur in life as completely pure, nor does falsehood occur as completely evil. I know that one gets really confused.

Some Muslims are in a hurry; they may quote the verse, "If two parties among the Believers fall into quarrel, you make peace between them: but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then you fight against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of Allah," (49:9) as if such fighting as happens in our age abides by this verse. Indeed, Muslims have for many centuries lost the sense of good guidance. What we have had for many centuries is misguidance fighting misguidance. Good guidance is the kind of community that was established at the hands of the Prophet and his companions. They did not use violence to establish it. So do not accept to be a gun in the hands of someone. It is not a light thing that one spills blood; and the Messenger was conscious that that would happen; hence his saying, "Do not after my passing revert to misguidance, slaying each other." (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

For how many centuries have Muslims tried to establish a well-guided situation with misguided means! It appears that things are just accepted because they have been with us for such a long time.

Do you know enough about the *khawarij*? Has it occurred to you that Muslims now accept their way and adopt it? They have been described by the Prophet as outside the Islamic peal, though they pray more than the rest of Muslims and fast more. Well, is not the distinguishing mark of this group that they have good intentions but do not mind to abandon Islamic teachings for realizing their purpose?

So please be wary; do not follow their way. Choose the way of clarity and good sense; do not stain your hand. Did not the Messenger establish the Muslim state without shedding the blood of one person? Is it not the way of light? Why do we forget? Let us not be like those who are described in the verse, "even if they see all our Signs, they will not believe in them; and if they see the way of right conduct, they will not adopt it as the Way; but if they see the way of error, that is the Way they will adopt." (7:146)

Is there some light perceived in all this? Even a very little glow would be something. Have we gone forward? Well, let us not lose hope, for if we are far from good sense, were not other nations far from democracy when it was new, but then realized its benefits and adopted it? And history will certainly support that; so it is no use trying to stop history.

But we need to analyze things as they happened to Muslims; they lost both good sense and democracy; and we need to know how. Because there are so many nations which have gone ahead of us. We only see events, but do not get to the laws behind them. We need to understand what deludes us; what makes misguidance alluring in our eyes, and why we are prepared to sacrifice our life and the life of others for the sake of this way.

It will be noticed that our disease is one and the same, a disease that afflicts both the religious-minded and the secularist, though it is displayed in two different contexts. The religious-minded cannot reconsider a life of good sense; nor can the secularist consider a democratic way of life. Is not that curious? How different, how hostile, but they have the same mindset. Can we tackle that?

A human resorts to violence when he/she fails to find the right way. Remember that Adam's other son resorted to killing when his sacrifice was rejected. For an act to be accepted with God, it has to realize two conditions: that it is done for God alone, and that it is done according to rules. This topic is discussed in detail in another book of mine, *Action: Ability and Will*. Two of the examples of different kinds of action that I listed there are:

1. A mother who is the perfect model of sincerity to her child; but because she is ignorant of the rules of hygiene, she might cause him/her to be disfigured (with polio.) This is a case of sincerity without correctness

2. A doctor who knows the right medicine, but does not care for the patient's cure, so he gives him the wrong orders. This is a case of correctness, without sincerity.

I may now say that the Muslim community, including its two varieties, the devout and the secularist, fail because they are of the first type. I have no doubt as to their good intentions, but they

do lack correctness. I am sure that all parties do intend to see their nation prosper and do well, but they, in all their varieties, have no confidence that they can get anywhere through intellectual means. They do not accept the intellectual challenge. They have no confidence that their ideas can do well in the intellectual arena. Both camps are intellectually defeated. They neither have faith in their ideas, nor in human beings. They feel that if people were given the choice, they would not choose the right faith.

And so people resort to physical means. They assume that if truth and falsehood were given equal opportunity, falsehood would prevail – a most dangerous assumption. For what is that truth that you want to devote yourself to if it cannot stand the test against falsehood?

The Qur'an says otherwise, "Nay, We hurl the Truth against falsehood, and it knocks out its brain, and behold, falsehood perishes;" (21:18) "And say: 'Truth has now arrived, and Falsehood perished: for Falsehood is by its nature bound to perish;'" (17:81) and "Say: 'Verily my Lord casts the mantle of Truth over His servants – He that has full knowledge of all that is hidden.' Say: 'The Truth has arrived, and Falsehood neither creates anything new, nor restores anything.'" (34:48-49); and promises victory to believers, "We will, without doubt, help Our Messengers and those who believe, both in this world's life and on the Day when the Witnesses will stand forth." (40:51)

It must seem paradoxical that the Qur'an promises victory to truth, although we see most wretched facts before us in this world. We should not wonder that so many people are pessimistic; for in their hurry they take truth to be defeated: even a scholar as distinguished as Toynbee is not sure that civilizations can stand the spiritual challenges in their way, and we saw how Nietzsche sees nothing in history but meanness and falsehood. But I refuse to view history within these short terms, nor through scattered situations.

We need to think of history in terms of humankind's progress and development. Are we not descendants of men who ate human flesh, and offered humans as sacrifice? The advance is immense; there must be no doubt about that. We no longer see men being put to death for their ideas (except in the Muslim world.)

So let it not be maintained that truth does not have the strength in itself to prevail over falsehood. We must not just let people believe that if truth and falsehood were given equal opportunity, falsehood would prevail. To think like that is thinking the worst about God, about truth, and about humankind. Nothing is more harmful than to take this idea for granted. We still hear so many people say that truth without the support of physical force is a myth. Indeed, if a human thinks that his/her faith will be defeated, it will be defeated, with or without force. Any idea that does not have in itself the power of survival will not survive. While sound thought will prevail. You see how the Prophet, peace be upon him, prevented his companions from any physical force – it was just pure intellectual debate; and they went on like this to they day they announced their state, never swerving a minute.

Is not this another example of how far we have been unfair to Islam? How far we disfigured it? Do not we have evidence enough in the Prophet's experience that truth, and truth alone, will come out triumphant in the conflict? Does it not show that for good sense to prevail you do not use misguided ways? Not a little and not a minimum – there must be no violent means at all in the bringing about of a community ruled by good sense. Not even by mistake did a Muslim kill a non-believer in Mecca, despite the torture some Muslims were subjected to, that in some cases ended in their death. Have you heard of a polytheist being assassinated?

And this is not weakness. It is that intellectual conflict must be intellectual – no physical element should confuse it. It is in this way that good sense is distinguished from misguidance.

The contrast is striking. The first Muslims felt sure about the light they bore, and they did get it through without resort to force; and we feel weak, and think that with force we can overcome others; but we cannot, neither with force, nor without. But if people do not accept this, then history will have more to inflict on them until they learn. For learn they must. It must settle in their minds that no rule made with force is well-guided, nor will it be at a later stage.

It is not enough that those who believe are really believers in the right faith. One can be very enthusiastic about what he takes to be true, but it is not completely true or completely untrue. For those who believe that Islam can be forced on people are doing great disfavor to Islam; it is not what the Qur'an teaches, "No compulsion!"

It must also be added that truth will itself lead to strength and solidity. A community built on truth is not weak. In a sane, well-built society, people believe by their own volition, and in this way they are not the servile subjects of the strong man who has dictated what they have to believe.

I think I have said enough about a clean hand, about not staining our hands with blood, about letting the faith get home on its own, about Adam's son; and I think I supported that with enough evidence from the Qur'an and the Prophet's, peace be upon him, traditions, both spoken, and his own application, and his companions'. But have I produced the desired change?

Is there solidity enough in the practice of the Prophet and his companions to resist this general trend in our community? We always say that their life is the model for the whole world, and for all humans. It is so. So can we accept their lead in this particular issue? For truth to have its way, it does not need any violence. It is clear enough. And we have the light standing there for all to behold.

It is also the realistic and optimal method for change, clear like the sun and the moon. And the Qur'an provides so many experiences of numerous prophets and believers to support this method. It relates that some believers had to suffer a lot, some paid with their own lives, "Woe to the makers of the pit of fire, fire supplied abundantly with fuel: Behold! They sat over against the fire, and they witnessed all that they were doing against the Believers. And they ill-treated them for no other reason than that they believed in Allah, Exalted in Power, Worthy of all Praise!" (85:4-8); Pharaoh's sorcerers said, when he was about to execute them, "For us, we are but sent back to our Lord: But you wreak your vengeance on us simply because we believed in the Signs of our Lord when they reached us! Our Lord! Pour out on us patience and constancy, and take our souls unto You as Muslims who bow to Your Will!" (7:125-126). Even in the face of death and torture, believers before us stuck to their way of faith, practicing it, calling to it, not stretching their hand with any kind of violence for its support. This is the way to make sure that the point of conflict is crystal clear.

To bring out most vividly the point of conflict is most vital. It is indeed in a human's nature when he/she sees two persons arguing to probe and see what argument each has to determine who is nearer the truth. This is something that Islam cares for a lot. Many of the pre-Islam Arabs made it a point of pride that they joined the conflict with one side against the other, without asking about the fairness of the issue; this is the famous tribal fanaticism. But Islam set a new principle: You will not side with a person, no matter how dear and near, unless his/her case is right, "O you who believe! Stand firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to Piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do;" (5:8) and "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both." (4:135)

The Prophet, peace be upon him, urged his companions to stop a Muslim, even when he happens to be a dear friend, from behaving aggressively or unfairly, "Deter his unfair behavior" he said (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim). It was especially striking as it came after the pre-Islam Arabs' boasting in their poetry that they rushed to help a friend or relative, never asking what the dispute was about. For if you ask, then you are not loyal to the tribe, even when the prey is not the culprit, but someone from his tribe.

The laws developed from there, from protecting the tribe, to being national, to being universal. Let it be said that for Arabs and Muslims, they have not gone beyond the tribal stage; they have not yet developed to the national stage – it is a stage they will have to go through to get to the stage of universality which is the idea of Islam. It is on this basis that I said that the European

Union is a new phenomenon in the world, and I bear the responsibility for my claim. But let me add here that there is something lacking in the European Union: they do not view humans as equal. They did prove that they are the most advanced (and I can imagine the Muslim's annoyance at this statement,) but they have not gone far enough.

Something else must be added, although I did mention it at the beginning of this book. It is not enough that one announces that he believes in universality. Do you not see that people speak of justice and equality but in any crisis they revert to their tribal ties, for those are deeper settled in their hearts. That shows you that it will take a lot of work to get the idea of universality to be the basis for people's behavior in real-life situations.

<u>The United Nations and the Tribal System</u>

Let me remind the reader of the United Nations, where there is much talk about justice and equality, but when it comes to acts, it is still dominated by tribalism; it is still stronger dog eating the weaker dog – how else can we understand the Veto Right? This also must come under our detailed and careful study and analysis. Let it be remembered that tribes and extended families have been there for hundreds of millenniums, while multi-ethnic societies are much more recent, not more than ten thousand years. The change has been slow. It is necessary to follow the development in history, for when you know the past and the present, you can plan for the next stage. It is also necessary because unless we reveal the facts, those who have big claims will go on behaving the way they like with impunity and shamelessness.

People have the law that is stated and written down; and they have another law that children absorb from their environment. But with our modern tools we can bring that under study and reveal the facts.

There is something like the emotional language that the baby receives from its parents and its family even before learning to talk, and many subconscious attitudes and concepts are deeply implanted in its mind even before it can speak. It will learn to distinguish between an angry look and a loving look, a tender tone and an angry tone. What its community imparts to it during those two or three years, and during the few years before he/she can read and write is a condensed version of culture, built up through thousands of years. By this time a child will have learnt all the sacred things which he/she must flare up if violated; and what makes his/her parents and people around him/her mad. He/she complies with all that because he/she needs to win acceptance.

As the child understands the language, he/she understands something else: that what people say can be at variance with, can completely contradict, what their behavior indicates. Much of this perception is unconscious. He/she will learn to sanctify certain things with words, not with deeds. But this discrepancy creates a lot of misery for people. The child learns in our society that the main thing for his/her success is learning maneuvers and dodging, to say what he/she does not mean, and to have the skill to hide his/her intentions; lying becomes the basis for success. He/she often believes that those who keep their word are naïve people.

Let us not turn our backs to these discussions. It is not life that is too complicated, but it is we who make it complicated. I assume that I have made some holes in this wall.

A new science is beginning to take form, though it cannot yet stand on its feet: the science of changing the contents of minds. I can think of it as medicine before germs were discovered. Was not the discovery of germs a turning point in medicine? Think how different medicine has become after germs were discovered! Now the world of ideas and concepts and attitudes is not so unlike that of the body; there is definite affinity between the two domains, both in composition and in diseases.

I know how complex things seem, but they are not so beyond the reach of humans. It is possible to bring the inside of the human being under our notice and control. The cultural diseases that are transmitted to individuals can be analyzed and controlled. But it is a very new domain, and our skills are quite unequal to the massive challenges.

If you wish to see an elimination of injustice and hypocrisy, then the first principle is to believe that, in the same way that stars and planets have their most accurate laws, human behavior has its very accurate laws. The Qur'an says about that, "Not your desires, nor those of the People of the book [nor of course any other group] can prevail: whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly. Nor will he find, besides Allah, any protector or helper." (4:123)

The main psychological trouble we are dealing with here is that a human disdains to have the laws that apply to others apply to him/her; or, in other words, a human believes that he/she has privileges that others do not have.

It would be a good test that one examines his own mind to see how far he accepts the principle of equality. It takes a daring heart to accept equality with others. And maybe no one will accept it unconditionally.

To accept this principle is to accept it even when the other refuses it. That is how the principle is laid down and established. No matter what faith or conviction the other holds, he has the right to claim equality. When I protect the other's right, I am eligible to the same right.

I May find some individuals who accept this principle, but will a community accept it? Will an entire society decide to stand for justice among all groups and classes? This must be our target. In this case you will be more worried for your society's transgressing against others than for others' transgressing against your society.

It would be rather easy when one is weak and oppressed to accept and believe in equality and justice and eliminating privileges; but what about when one is strong, rich, and dominant?

All previous societies came to perdition, and their mistake was the same – pride. The only exception is Jonah's people. It is important to remember that it is not impossible to realize the state of curbing arrogance and pride, but we seem to be still in the crawling stage in the domain of having the necessary skill to bring about this state.

Muslims should not feel that they are privileged to be the dominant party, especially as for many centuries they have been living without good sense "*al-rushd* in Qur'anic diction;" they practice arrogance in the same way as other societies do.

But, it is time we awoke. The perdition of many peoples before us should awaken us, and what happened in Europe should awaken us. At least they overcame arrogance among themselves.

I do realize that for some time our intellect will not be working optimally; it will not be an easy task to detect the link between causes and effects, and to reap the results of past experiences. But history is waiting for us. It heartens us to review its events, for in it we have one of the richest sources of knowledge. No wonder God grants it that superior place. When people lose hope, their best salvation is to turn to history.

History as the Reference for Acquiring Knowledge According to the Qur'an

To know right from wrong, the Qur'an directs us to refer to history. It is there that we review the continual conflict between the arrogant and the callers to justice and mercy. Think this over time and time again; for by laying it nearest your heart you give stability and steadiness to your heart; without history, we are unlikely to adhere to our constructive work.

If we fail to learn from past events, then God will never despair, and He ordained that history will not despair. History is there to penalize people until they have sense.

Do you envision the enormity of the trust left in a human's hands? Do not listen to those who insist on nihilism, for this principle makes any activity vain and pointless. Do not think that man's intellect is the reference, for it can stumble at every step – it is history rather which can be trusted, for it does not act in compliance with men's whims and caprices. Men have the option to refer to the recorded history, for if they fail to do so, history will make of them an example of what it costs to ignore it. This latter option is always mentioned in the Qur'an, as in the verse, "And you shall certainly know the truth of it after a while." (38:88)